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The Mass Media in Moldova: Political Implications

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The political, social, economic and spiritual transformations through which Moldova has been passing during transition from totalitarianism to democracy have generated multiple communicational implications. The most spectacular ones, which are also the most paradoxical, take place in the realm of the media.

The local mass media, enrolled and enslaved until the last decade of the last century by the old regime, alienated before then from their natural goal of informing accurately and freely the citizens on issues of public interest, fell in the early '90s under the multifaceted influence of the disintegration of the ubiquitous monopoly of the communist party. It was then that the general euphoria, common for the entire society, created the illusion of a quick and irrevocable transition from a doctrinaire journalism to a free journalism. It seemed that the mass media would give up instantly and promptly their vicious previous practice, would apply new management and operation formulas, would abandon the power zone (the sphere of their accreditation during totalitarianism) and would become institutionalized as a component of the public communicational space and, therefore, of the civil society.

Such expectations were not unfounded. They were supported by the political pluralism, the freedom of the press proclaimed and later (in 1994) legalized in the Fundamental Law, and Moldova's accession to international laws that protected citizen rights and freedoms. Despite the liberalization of communications, the long-expected transformations did not take place. The media remained almost unchanged from a structural and functional point of view. They became multipolar; otherwise, they continued oscillating around the institutions of power or around the formations aspiring to power. State control, division and political partisanship distorted their essence and inevitably placed them in a state of social pre-bankruptcy.

The state ownership in the realm of communications in this period meant the transfer to state ownership of media assets of the former governing party, limited access to information sources, preferential funding of the media depending on the degree of their loyalty to power, etc. In the early '90s, according to our calculations the state owned about 50 percent of the printed press and practically all of the electronic media. One should note that in Moldova state ownership of the media has been promoted in the last decade by all governments, regardless of their political orientation.

This fact has a number of explanations. One is the unwillingness of public authorities to give up the pocket press. A telling example in this sense was the fate of the newspaper *Sfatul tarii*. It was founded in the early '90s as an

organ of the parliament, trying to practice a different kind of journalism, offering to the audience information that did not always correspond to the political appetite of the legislators in that period. The legislators had the courage to tolerate the paper only for several months, after which they stopped funding it. As a consequence, the paper soon stopped publication.

The state ownership of the press—to continue with the second explanation of this phenomenon—was tacitly approved, on the other hand, by the majority of editors and journalists. The truth was that during the party-state the press had never been seen as a business or as an enterprise that could survive on its own. Central planning provided the necessary financial resources for its operation, while the journalists' task was to use the allocated resources in a certain way. In the new conditions, the journalists—although they had given preference to a market economy from the very start—turned out to be unable to operate in accordance with their preference. In those circumstances journalists had several options: one was difficult but also honorable, i.e. to adjust to the rules of a market economy and, confronting internal difficulties, to gain their freedom and independence not only in the economic sphere, but also in the political and professional ones. Another option was easier, more appealing but also vicious and dangerous, i.e. to accept the old rules of their existence and thus sacrifice the freedom of the press. The majority of the media opted then for the second way. A telling example in this respect was the governmental newspaper *Moldova Suverana*. Several years ago this publication declared its independence from its founder, the government of Moldova, because the latter did not meet its financial obligations. As an independent newspaper *Moldova Suverana* survived a little longer than 24 hours. In the meantime, the government transferred the money to the paper's account and the newspaper gave up its declaration of independence. Although at that point the newspaper's initiative was seen by the local observers, including myself, as a sign that the process of press liberation from the state had started, this turned out to be a banal gesture of applying pressure on the founder.

The state's presence on the information market has shrunk recently. This phenomenon, however, affected mainly the national and local printed press. At the same time, the state continues to maintain wide control over the broadcast media. One relevant example in this respect is the status of the only national radio and TV operator—the Teleradio Moldova State Company. This institution, which was declared "public" by the Broadcast Law of 1995 (art.7.1), should also be, according to art.1 of the same law, "independent in its editorial decisions" and should reflect "the interests of all social strata." In reality, this institution is true to the qualifier "state" in its name and practices open political partisanship. The State Company Teleradio Moldova

has always acquiesced to its enslavement by the governing party or political alliances, except perhaps for the period 1992-96, when the national broadcaster tried valiantly to practice unbiased journalism.

The facts presented above prove, in our opinion, that the power in Moldova, even when it is institutionalized as a result of democratic elections, is tempted to play an active role in communications. The state communication media in Moldova, although they are funded by public money, serve the power. They are ultimately the exponent of the political force, which is in power at the moment. That is, public money is used by a certain party in order to promote its own interests even when its social support is wide or is pretended to be wide. From this point of view, the state communication media do not stimulate the freedom of expression and opinion. This makes us see them as bankrupt media institutions. A similar grade, and for similar reasons, is to be given to the party press or to the press that claims to be free and independent, but which practices political mercenariness.

The party press is a constant in Moldova's media realm. It has been a feature both during the totalitarian period as well as during the period of transition to democracy. The changes in the early '90s failed to modify the essence of party press, although they lent it new reasons. In this context, we shall mention two events, which we believe are relevant. One was the launch of the *Glasul* newspaper, and the other—the publication of another newspaper, *Tara*, which until recently was the organ of the Popular Christian Democratic Party of Moldova (PPCD). Those media events, on the one hand, signaled the end of the domination of a single party (the communist party) over the media, and on the other hand reflected the ambivalent evolution of the national printed press. At that time, *Glasul* could be characterized as a potential reference point of the pluralism in Moldovan press. *Tara*, as we were to see later, marked the beginning of a multi-party press. In the first case one could feel an intention to build a press that would reflect the entire range of opinions in our society, which in turn would start the freedom of expression and an impartial approach to social and other arrangements. The second case heralded the freedom of heterogeneous political formations to express themselves in the media. Both trends were appropriate at that time. The previous totalitarian party-state, which had completely smothered the civil society, had also gained total control over media communications and given it a monochromatic ideological character. The freedom of the press thus became the litmus test for the transition from totalitarianism to democracy, an expression of the opposition between the state and a civil society in development.

The subsequent developments in the printed press in our country showed that from the two trends one could see at the beginning of the implementation of democratic values, the development of media on the basis of a multi-party system turned out to be the most important one.

The unprecedented growth in the number of political formations (in the first half of the '90s there were more than

50, and towards the end of the last century their number diminished to 26) was accompanied by a proliferation of party press. Almost every political association considered as its duty the publication of a newspaper. The editorial activity of parties has been as persevering as it has been unstable. Its curb is rising during elections. The parliamentary elections of February 2001 proved this once again. The intensity of interest towards the press decreases abruptly immediately after the votes have been cast. The only exception are the parties that accumulate more votes than the threshold established by the current electoral legislation. The ephemeral nature of many party publications, as well as the lack of discipline among editors concerning the legal print deposit make it practically impossible to fully estimate statistically this layer of the printed press. The data available permit an approximate estimation of the presence of party newspapers on our information market. Thus, party publications have a 40% share of the total number of relatively stable newspapers. This number, although it does not reflect exactly the quantitative parameters of the party press, is still extremely high, especially if we take into account the still massive presence of the state on the mass media market.

The party press as a media phenomenon perfectly represents the doctrinaire journalism and, from this point of view, represents, we believe, just like the state press, a failure in media practice. It is a failure because it goes contrary to the essence of free journalism circumscribed to the public communication space. In 1972 Theodore White wrote: "The power of the press is a primary one. It establishes the agenda of public discussion." For it is public discussion on public issues that represents a defining quality of the public communication space. The party press in general, the newspapers published by various political formations in our country in particular, go beyond the boundaries of this space. By filtering information, they place on the agenda issues with obviously party-related connotations. As a conclusion we might say that the party press, by virtue of its current status and concerns, is essentially a bankrupt press. At the same time, the local media practice offers examples of a different nature, which can be catalogued equally as revealing and paradoxical.

One of them could be *Observatorul de Chisinau*. The newspaper was launched during the parliamentary elections of 1994 by the Party of Reforms. It was published for a short period of time—from 16 November 1993 to 15 March 1994. The Party of Reforms did not have the necessary social support, was left behind in the elections race and soon disappeared from the political arena. The newspaper *Observatorul de Chisinau* disappeared from the information market along with it. Thus, the way the party behaved was quite usual, not at all reformist. However, *Observatorul's* conduct and informational consistency showed that the party suited perfectly its own name.

The revelation that the paper produced and that, I believe, will be marked in the modern history of the media in Moldova, was that *Observatorul* (perhaps also due to the

professionalism of its staff and their desire to practice good-quality journalism) showed a clear desire to respect the citizen's right to information. The party newspaper *Observatorul de Chisinau* was an exception rather than the rule in the realm of party press. The party press generally preferred to tell the people what to think instead—as the political scientist Bernard C. Cohen wrote in his book *The Press and Foreign Policy*—“of telling them what to think about.”

In Moldova, too, this fact has started to be on people's minds. Some political formations detach themselves from their own periodicals, giving them the right to operate autonomously. We shall mention in this context the PPCD newspaper *Tara*. This gesture points either to an understanding that doctrinaire journalism is a bankrupt genre or to a new attempt to mislead the public. Future developments will, I believe, reveal the real intention.

The state press and that of the parties in power, or that which operates exclusively in the political space of Moldova, has sufficient chances to leave behind the public or private papers. Their number in Moldova's media landscape is irrelevant, while the behavior of national and municipal papers usually carries imprints of political partisanship. This fact marks another bankrupt media practice developed in the last decade by the local printed press. An exception in this sense seems to be the private district printed press united under the Association of Independent Press. In the same context one might remark (with all due reservations) the private broadcasting (a number of radio and TV stations created the Association of Electronic Press APEL), as well as the private news agencies.

The Moldovan public and private media communication not involved in the spheres of power represents at the moment an option rather than a significant reality. From this point of view *Jurnal de Chisinau* and the brand-new *Timpul* could be mentioned. The possible early local elections will certainly test these publications, confirming or proving wrong this supposition.

Recently the media in our country have started to lose gradually their informational consistency—which we also believe to be a bankrupt practice. An uninformed person may look through the local newspapers and get the impression that nothing or almost nothing is happening in this country. To be sure, Chisinau is neither Rome nor Paris. Moldova is neither Italy nor France. Anyway, events are taking place here too, smaller or bigger ones, which influence our daily life. But they are not reflected by the mass media. The informational inconsistency has curbed readers' interest for the local press. The nearly total lack of national and county dailies (a fact that denotes a profound decline in our printed press), the belated reactions of existing publications to current events, the use of old news, the unjustified narrowing of the geographical news area (to the perimeter of Chisinau)—these and other reasons cause a situation when an increasing number of readers give up on newspapers as a source of information.

The penury of information in the local press is accompanied by its distortion. The transformation of the journalistic message into spectacle is caused by the desire to

offer to readers information that would entertain and captivate them, as well as by the temptation felt by some to articulate forcefully their own skills or to honor ostentatiously the order of those who pay. As a consequence, the contents of the message is lost.

The marginalization of local news, the distortion of information depending on party sympathies and journalists' inspiration take place here side by side with what we call office journalism. The animators of this sort of journalism use the Internet to copy whole pages about, say, bearded and shaven presidents, old and young officials, etc., thus contributing to the circulation of foreign press. Their effort is a good one, if we take into account that we don't have access to European and American newspapers. The stories by these office journalists are written in an elegant and elevated manner with a little humor and irony; they are sometimes curious, amusing, spectacular, sometimes perhaps even useful. Their abundance, however, resembles a special way of escaping our cruel reality or an attempt to calm down the spirits that are, in some people's opinion, too politicized. I insist on this fact, because one can feel the dangerous tendency to sacrifice the coherent, full, unbiased information about current reality in the name of manipulating the public opinion.

The mass media represent the distinguishing mark, the barometer or indicator of social evolution. We shall make it clear that in this case it is not only their quantitative and qualitative parameters that matter, but also the purpose of their actions. At present the media communication in Moldova denotes two purposes. One is the predisposition (voluntary or imposed) of the media to be an element of the political society. The second one points to their intention to become a component of the civil society. For now the media in our country give preference to the first purpose. Its vulnerability resides in the fact that in this way the media communication becomes enrolled into the structures of power and, consequently, acts as a coercive factor in its relations with information consumers. This practice goes against the nature of the mass media launched in the 18th century under the banner of the freedom of the press as an exponent of civil society. It is natural only for totalitarian regimes, in which the press are part of the coercive mechanism. The number and the social impact of the Moldovan media concentrated on the second purpose is still insignificant. In any event, we believe that it is this second type of the press, which is the appropriate one for modern society.

The value of civil society—an inseparable part of the democratic modernization process of social life—implicitly requires the edification of such a system of media communication, in which the main substance should go to public media, that is those, which by their very nature will put in the foreground the human being in its role of citizen, social and political actor. In other words, democratization requires a state-free press, without political or party engagements, a pluralist press that would cover the entire range of civil society, a press that would watch over and frustrate the power each time it forgets that it does not represent itself but the civil society. ■

Analysis

Who Severs the Public from Its Antennae?

Victor OSIPOV

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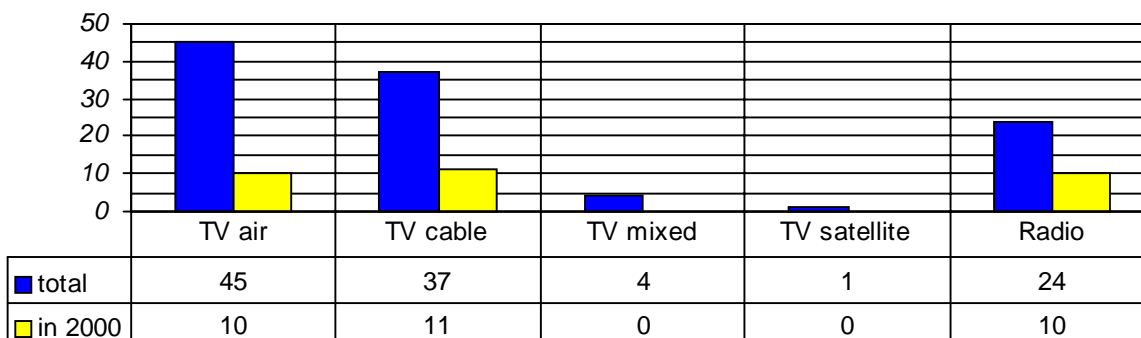
In order not to perpetuate the general supposition in the title, I will explain from the beginning the meaning of the purposeful insinuation of the undersigned. Any person may set up in his house a radio antenna, and in our case the point is about radio and TV programs. And this person is happy when he/she can receive programs close to his or her soul and aspirations. Moreover, a radio or TV station, which expresses its public's way of being, ideas and beliefs similar to the public's, is a means of indirect realization of the right to a free transmission of opinions. So, if someone wants to express their own opinion, the easiest way to do it is also through the radio or TV station whose audience they represent. They may send a letter, come to the show, inform reporters about certain issues, or take part in telephone discussions. In other words, the shows, through their Hertzian vibrations, fill with essence the space between antennae (whether broadcasting or receiving ones) and the person. It is only in shows that a person can be him/herself, become or express him/herself. And, most importantly, they have the constitutional right to require such things. Especially from over-the-air radio and TV stations, regardless of their form of ownership, for they all use broadcast frequencies—a commodity that belongs to all and is offered on condition that it satisfy the public's various interests. The question mark I placed in a way on the space between the public and its own antennae concerns the contents, the programs broadcast in the electronic-media market of Moldova. Paradoxically, in our country the larger is the number of programs broadcast, the less can an ordinary person take part in the exchange of information. So there is someone who severs the public from its own antennae by the programs broadcast and received in this space. How? It is very simple—by offering programs produced in places far away from the reality and people of Moldova; these are foreign products that replace the local ones, expected by the

public.

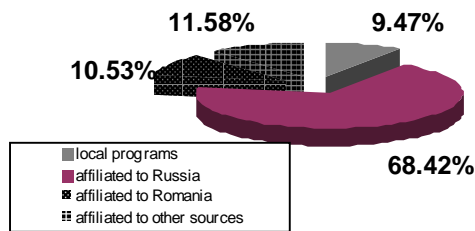
The last few years have passed without new processes in the electronic media of Moldova. One could observe a sort of preservation of the same trend in the development of the radio and TV market. The elements of this continuity are nevertheless interesting. The year 2000 was the last year full of activities for the previous team of the Broadcasting Coordinating Council (BCC). In Moldova there is no gradual replacement of the members of the authority regulating the broadcast media, as is the case in France, for example. By its fourth year of existence it became absolutely clear that the BCC was no longer able to adopt a new way of regulating this area. On the contrary, the moral, technical and professional working capacity of this authority allowed a deepening of the old contradictions. It continued to display its lack of competence, firmness and respect for the public interest. The young broadcast market felt the continuing void of authority and went on developing mainly on mercantile principles. Given the economic crisis and the fierce struggle for the "initial accumulation" of capital, the broadcast media followed rules of the game not written in the Broadcast Law. Thus, the crisis of a coordinating intelligence in the area became deeper, while the businesses—most of which were affiliated to foreign radio and TV networks—persevered in exploiting the internal info-cultural space, offering in return too little or even nothing in terms of local programming. One can thus speak about two main factors that define the situation of broadcasting in Moldova: the crisis of legal authority and the brutal expansion of commercial interests.

However, some effects of these trends, whether direct or indirect, have produced new events, too. For the first time the civil society had firm public reactions and even appealed to courts to defend itself from the excessive presence of Russian stations in the local info-cultural circuit. It is interesting to notice the behavior of state authorities, that of BCC too, as well as to notice some changes in the indicators that reflect the ascension and scope of the private radio and TV sector. Some succinct case studies and observer

Broadcast licenses (total and for 2000)



The use of channels (frequencies) by private stations in 2000



comments will fill in the image that the broadcasting industry of Moldova has enjoyed in the last two years.

Broadcast Licenses. A Few Quantitative Indicators

The first broadcast licenses were officially issued to the private sector in the Republic of Moldova in 1995-97. Therefore, BCC's recent concerns in this area developed in two directions: to issue new licenses and extend the licenses that had expired. According to the License Register, updated on 20 November 2000 (the last one made public by BCC), 31 broadcast licenses were issued and extended during that year. There was a total of 111 valid licenses at that moment in time, of which: 45 for over-the-air TV, 37 for cable TV, 4 for mixed TV (over-the-air and cable), 1 for satellite TV, and 24 for radio.

It is worth mentioning that BCC intensified the distribution of frequencies towards the end of its mandate, which showed a growing interest for this activity. The contests for licenses had become a formality. The initial criteria for selecting winners were ignored, with decisions being based almost exclusively on the simple mechanism of voting. The process of broadcast license distribution became even more banal, which exposed the legal imperfections and the lack of a general concept of development for this area; it was BCC's obligation to develop such a concept.

Here are several observations on typical cases. Radio Polidisc received on 29 February 2000 an additional broadcast license—that is, an additional frequency for Chisinau. Polidisc had at that moment two licenses, thus gaining a third one, and all three were in the FM band. Why does a radio station need three frequencies in the same band in the same city? And how fair is it to others wishing to set up new radio stations in this community? Radio Polidisc uses only one frequency, the most disadvantageous one, to broadcast only its own programming. The second frequency has been used for a long time to rebroadcast the Moscow-based station Russkoe Radio. BCC repeatedly condemned this approach. But in the end BCC has given this station a third frequency, and now Polidisc rebroadcasts another Moscow-based station, Radio Monte Carlo. This is clear proof of favoritism, double standards and disregard for the public interest on the part of BCC. To be sure, the imperfection of legal provisions concerning licensing leaves

Analysis

enough room for bureaucrats to promote group interests at the expense of a normal development of the broadcast market in Moldova. When Polidisc's licenses expired on 24 October 2000, BCC renewed them for three more years. The problem of proper use of these frequencies by this broadcaster has never been examined seriously.

The procedure of license renewal compromised even further BCC's image in the case of Radio d'Or-Avtoradio. In the summer of 2000, when its license had to be renewed, Radio d'Or decided to abandon its own programming and start rebroadcasting the Avtoradio station from Moscow. This was not settled beforehand with BCC, and BCC reacted by withdrawing Radio d'Or's broadcast license. At the same time, BCC suspended the license issued to Radio Vox on 25 April 2000, which in reality rebroadcast Radio Maximum (also Moscow-based) without proper authorization. The scandal flared up and was covered in most newspapers in Chisinau. It seemed that the authority regulating broadcasting in Moldova had finally started acting decisively. But shortly afterwards everyone could see the contrary—BCC revoked, miraculously, its own decision and allowed the two broadcasters to do what they wanted.

Also in 2000, Radio The Little Samaritan renewed its license; this is a radio station founded by the exponents of the evangelical Christianity from USA. This is the widest land network of private radio stations in Moldova, which often comes under the criticism of the Orthodox Church—the official confession, shared by the absolute majority of the country's population. The Little Samaritan has at least 11 licenses in the FM band, which have been obtained through a special relationship with BCC. The former BCC president went on a private visit to USA following an invitation from The Little Samaritan; this visit carried the promise of acquiring advanced American experiences in broadcasting. The only obvious result of that visit has been, so far, the propagation of evangelical teachings in Moldova through a continuously increasing number of radio frequencies.

The chain of strange events in this "frequency saga" has brought about two new events. Two broadcast licenses were offered, announcing unprecedented entries. Info Radio appeared as a station whose format promised the most intense output of news and analytical programs on the Chisinau radio market. Stil-TV appeared as an important station because for the first time BCC offered to a private station a network of eight licenses with powers between one and twenty kW, while a local financial group promised serious investments in the area. But the two novelties shattered. In October 2001, Info Radio was replaced by the Russian station Ekho Moskvu under approval from the new BCC team. And Stil-TV lost its license because it did not move beyond an unrealized promise.

The Contents of Broadcasting

The main problem connected with the info-cultural circuit in the broadcast space of Moldova is the crisis and disadvantage of the local producer. The most damaging consequence of this problem is that the public has extremely few possibilities to receive local and national information

from alternative sources, i.e. local radio and TV stations. And the public finds itself in a situation when it has to listen to radio stations and watch TV programs broadcast from outside the country, most of them coming from Moscow. This sort of programming grew and expanded over ever wider territories between 1997-2001 with the tacit or explicit agreement from BCC or other state authorities of Moldova. Although the Broadcast Law places public interest before everything else, making it a fundamental criterion for the development of this sector, it is being ignored when real decisions are taken, both in licensing and taxation.

From a statistical point of view, one may say that at the end of 2001 the origin of over-the-air radio and TV programs is as follows: 65 frequencies carry programs mainly from Moscow, 10-from Romania, 11-from other sources, and only 9 have mainly local programming.

There has been no analysis done of programs and of the general supply of broadcast products, perhaps for lack of funds and interest. However, some independent commentators have pointed out the hazard generated in Moldova by the fact that the audience is being "rented out" to strong radio and TV networks from Moscow. The right of Moldovan citizens to be informed is strongly endangered in the broadcast sector of the mass media. People are much more familiar with what is happening in Russia than in their own country and communities. Most of the country has access to only one radio station and one TV station—the ones controlled by the state. But there are from two to six Russian channels, both public and private, available in each community, and this number is growing.

While the local informational element is so restrained in its presence on the media market of Moldova, the cultural and educational elements are almost entirely absent. The only news in TV programming came when the BINGO show was launched in 2000—a TV lottery for poor and underdeveloped countries. The fact that this show appeared first on the National TV, which is supposed to be a public institution, shows the absolute invasion of our broadcasting by mercantilism.

Radio Antena C can be considered the leader in producing radio programs. This station was founded by the Chisinau City, covering also Balti and Causeni. As a whole, however, private radio and TV stations produce few programs of a quality below average. One has to mention that local stations try to produce their own programs; they even participate in various contests with their products. This shows that there is interest for

producing original programming and it will become visible when conditions encourage this by eliminating the unfair competition between broadcasters—between those who produce their own programs and those who rebroadcast foreign ones.

Private Broadcasting in the Economic Situation of Moldova

The lack of a concept of broadcast development has led to a disproportional and illogical development of the sector. Economic and other kinds of rationales have been ignored, although the procedure of licensing requires their consideration. The number of radio and TV stations shows their hyper-agglomeration in Chisinau vis-a-vis the advertisement market, which is the main source of legal incomes. The precarious economic situation in Moldova conditions a weak flow of advertising cash, which is almost nonexistent in areas remote from economic centers.

As we have seen in the section on licensing, there are more TV than radio stations in Moldova, although the latter require fewer investments and smaller operational costs. As a result, the absolute majority of local TV stations are very limited in their equipment, most of which is old. Their production capacity is very small, which reduces their attractiveness for advertisers. The economic crisis is the main factor that forces radio and TV station owners to look for other ways of making their businesses profitable. One of these solutions has turned into a plague for the information circuit of Moldova—the stations have chosen to rebroadcast programs produced by foreign stations because this is cheaper.

The crisis of resources conditions the absence from the broadcast market of mechanisms indispensable to the economic activity of and competition between radio and TV stations. In 2001 again no services for ratings and audience structure have been established. Unfortunately, there is no information about the magnitude of the advertising market, the amount of incomes and investments, nor have there been surveys to describe the exact economic environment, in which broadcasters operate. Therefore, expert estimates in this respect are usually of a general nature and have a limited practical use. ■

The Information Space Allocated to Commercial Radio Stations is Molded on Russian Patterns

Vasile BOTNARU,
Executive Director, BASA-Press

The new radio stations that have appeared recently on the information market of Chisinau are trying to mold the information space of Moldova on Russian patterns.

The values promoted by these stations, some of which are certain while others are of very doubtful uprightness, are being

unscrupulously borrowed in the permissive conditions stipulated by the national legislation in the area. Since the local license holders are not obliged by the Broadcast Law to ensure a mandatory share of original programming, station managers prefer to rebroadcast popular Russian stations and, without much effort, to glean the cream, i.e. station that used to broadcast news at every quarter of an hour in Romanian and in Russian, thus ensuring the real

bilinguism that President Voronin supports. But this station finally gave up its costly autonomy and turned to the sandwich method. On the frequency 102.7 we can now here even the exact hour in Moscow.

As a consequence, one more FM frequency from the quite limited range that Moldova owns has been allocated to information from Russia. One more station tells the Chisinau listeners about the weather forecast for the Moscow region, about the preferences of the opinion leaders in Russia, the issues that Moscow authorities have to tackle, new books that Moldovans can't read, music trends in Russia, etc.

Actually, one radio station in Chisinau has the nerve to inform the listeners in the capital of Moldova even about traffic jams on the streets of Moscow.

The most eccentric or exotic recent acquisition seems to be the radio station Chanson, which was accepted by the Broadcast Coordinating Council (BCC) probably because it thought that the station would focus on the French chanson.

In reality, however, the license was given for a complete rebroadcast of a radio station based on prison folklore. Local experts believe that the esthetic outlook of this radio station does a great disfavor not only to the officials in Chisinau, who are preoccupied with compromising authentic values, but also to the "true" Russians, who are running the risk of being eclipsed by those tattooed messengers with hoarse voices. "In the democratic diversity of Russia this genre of (sub)culture has its place too, but why do we have to plant it in our country, where we already can witness interminable gang fights, while 'thieves in law' claim places next to the great personalities of our nation," professors at the department of journalism wonder when they have to explain to their students how broadcasting works in Moldova.

Several BCC members have acknowledged that they voted with their eyes closed to issue a license to Radio Chanson, and now they regret that they "have let the flea-ridden cat into the house," but it's too late. They say that a possible way to annihilate the radio stations that put out aggressive messages would be to impose "access fees" and "rebroadcast fees" of variable magnitudes. These fees are supposed to encourage radio stations that contribute to the promotion of the values of a civil society and discourage nonvalues and excessive commercialization.

These fees were approved by parliament and included in the amended Broadcast Law, but they were rejected by the president and stand no chances of being applied.

Hence, BCC members believe that the market and the consumer will decide whether "the mushrooms that have sprung up recently" are edible or, on the contrary, poisonous.

The new BCC has brought back the old discussion about the discernment of the authorities that distribute, with the generosity of prodigal children, the few frequencies they have, without asking in return for the observation of some civic, national duties. Press managers who give up (under the pressure of competition) local programs in the state language in favor of Moscow-based stations cannot help President

Voronin to install the real bilingualism that he had told Putin about. According to Voronin's idea of bilingualism, Russian speakers have to know the official language of Moldova to the extent to which Moldovans speak Russian. Besides this concern there is another one, which is linked to sovereignty and independence, a desideratum invoked by communist authorities on every occasion.

The radio stations that inform the listeners in Chisinau round-the-clock about the activities of the Moscow mayor, Iuri Luzhkov, about weather and political forecasts by which his administration operates, can in no way be considered "war comrades" to the power in Chisinau, which declares that it wants to build a strong state, based on patriotic thought.

However, just by accident these stations cultivate, with or without permission, among the listeners in Chisinau a spirit of belonging to the information space—and not to it alone—of the Russian Federation, which is a thing not to be condemned from the point of view of our current government. Hence, the commercial rationale that governs the broadcasting market might have a double bottom.

Editor's note: Largely agreeing to what BASA-Press said in this article, one should clarify that it is not "commercial rationale" that determines the elimination from the information market of radio stations broadcasting in Romanian, but on the contrary, it is an occult policy of advertising placement, which deliberately and discriminatorily avoids local stations. Who has instituted and funds massively and conspiratorially the monopoly of the Russian electronic press on the territory of Moldova, threatening the security of the state, which is under the supervision of communists, and why is the guarantor of our Constitution, the perspicacious President Voronin silent on this? These questions will become the subject of a special investigation.

The Printed Press in the Republic of Moldova between the Pressure of Ideology and the Imperative of Professionalism

Constantin CHEIANU

A foreigner, who knew Moldova some five or ten years ago, would read today's newspapers in Moldova with a strong feeling of *déjà vu*. The ideology, issues, approaches and the tone have largely stayed unchanged despite the transformations that have taken place in recent years. As unchanged and as undefeatable are the idiosyncrasies and intolerance that exist between publications and journalists with differing viewpoints on the country's future, as well as—paradoxically—on its past.

Media Performance

The pro-Russian press, the pro-independence one, as well as the pro-Romanian one approach and promote their viewpoints radically, uncompromisingly, voicing in a way a certain radicalism that has layered up society, but also fomenting this radicalism. This radicalism oftentimes goes against those who are kindling it. For pro-Romanian journalists everything that arrives from across the Prut river is seen in rosy colors and, on the contrary, everything that arrives from Russia is suspected of impure intentions, just as for the pro-Russian press and a good part of the pro-independence one Romania represents what Russia used to be for President Reagan, i.e. an "evil empire." While on some issues the pro-independence and the pro-Russian press admit conciliatory positions, none of them accept conciliation with the pro-Romanian press, just as the latter doesn't like such conciliation either. It so happens that the political forces which fall outside these trends and which have promoted compromise solutions, as well as the publications representing them, have not had for now success in Moldova's political life, which is an objective phenomenon if we think of the "radical" differences in the quality of life of different social strata.

The press in Moldova approach economic issues and international integration in a totally different way. Most of them, regardless of their ideological preferences, share a more-or-less liberal program: no force sees a return to communism, they are all for democracy, for the market economy, for privatization, for European Integration, for preserving relations with Russia and CIS; only the pace, methods, forms differ. However, this similarity of views in the realm of economy doesn't help them find conciliatory bridges in the realm of politics either.

How does this "ideological war" in our press reflect

the feelings and concerns of the Moldovan society? Paradoxically, while 70% of Moldova's population have to carry the heavy burden of the economic actions of recent years, 70% of the issues covered by newspapers are in politics. Even the fact that people cannot buy newspapers for the same economic reasons—i.e. poverty—is ignored. According to the most recent opinion poll conducted by the Civis Center, commissioned by the Institute for Public Policies, about 30% of the respondents read—not systematically—printed media.

All the polls conducted in the last years have shown that the main concerns of the Moldovan society are poverty, crime, corruption, and that citizens do not see a direct link between these troubles bugging the country and themselves, and the options for Russia, for Romania, or for independence.

The Impact of the Printed Press

The totalitarian heritage, which our printed press still have to fight against, can sometimes be felt in how the press perform. While during the communist regime journalists were subject to ideological censorship, today it is they who exercise a formidable ideological pressure on readers.

One other stereotype that is a hold-over from totalitarianism, but which became stronger during the years of national emancipation is how the role of the press is being understood. In 1989 this played an important role in uncovering the historical truth and had an educational, didactic, propagandistic—in the good sense of the word—role; unfortunately, this interpretation of the role of the press has continued for the following 10-12 years almost without any adjustment to the radical changes that have occurred. The starting idea has always been that the people need to be educated in a national spirit, but in the meantime the people have been flooded by a plethora of many other problems: the war in Transnistria, privatization, the saga of privatization value bonds, poverty, corruption, etc., etc. And our press only touched on all these issues, or reflected them unilaterally, their main concern being to educate the people in a pro-Romania, pro-Russia, or pro-independence spirit. One cannot remember a single major campaign or scandal in our press involving corruption, abuse of power, women trafficking, organized crime, etc. But we have no shortage of "bombs" linked to all sorts of "national symbols." A corrupt public official, who shares, say, the

pro-independence ideals, has never been taken to task by the press of the same color, just as the corrupt pro-Romania patriots have never been covered (with very rare exceptions) by the pro-Romania press.

To be sure, our publications do not ignore the expectations and concerns of the people completely. Newspapers write quite a lot about poverty, crime, corruption, but this is a somewhat ostentatiously enthusiastic, catch-the-thief approach. Our publications limit their approach to pointing to and condemning such phenomena; there isn't a constant, coherent concern about such phenomena, which have to be not only pointed to but also followed in their evolution and development. Besides, our publications have shown a belated reaction to various phenomena and events. Sometimes it happened that we learned about the real scale of a phenomenon in our society from reports drawn by international organizations (for instance issues concerning migration, poverty, corruption, the remuneration level as compared to other countries, or women trafficking), and only later we would see in our newspapers a more systematic coverage of such subjects. However, the most pertinent and exact articles have been written on these topics by foreign journalists. This is a clear indication of the fact that our newspapers are not familiar with (or ignore) the reality in their own country, as well as the reader.

The press in Moldova tend to influence and manipulate rather than inform; they advocate various causes rather than present them objectively ; they just blow the whistle rather than investigate; they interpret facts rather than reveal them. From this point of view the majority of the press here represent what we used to call "a biased press."

There is one factor contributing to the low impact of the mass media. According to the same Civis poll, the media are third among the institutions which our citizens trust the most (following the Church and the President). On the other hand, however, this feeling is not supported by the citizens' confidence in the mass media as a force able to change things, just as they do not believe in their own ability to influence decisions taken by authorities at all levels.

This strong trust in the mass media has to be linked to another factor. The attitude towards the press is determined in every society by its expectations, by the "degree of truth" it needs, which is in turn directly linked to the level of culture and political maturity of that society. Some societies may feel happy just with the fact that "the press are fighting well," while others need analysis, investigations, comments, revelations. It seems that the needs of our society in this respect are limited to "criticism."

The impact of our press is limited on the one hand by subjective reasons, i.e. due to their own performance, the

level of professionalism, etc., but also by objective reasons that spring from the system in which we live. Society in Moldova, just like in other countries in transition, is a "status" one, which, according to Max Webber, is a society in which convention is much more important than law as a means of regulation. The "status" groups are those that have obtained a special recognition of their status on the basis of certain monopolies, and it is not the law but rather their opinions that determine decision making, cash flows and the course of the country. One can read in our press critical articles about some negative phenomena, about corrupt public officials, cases of abuse and brutal violation of laws, but the effect of such writing is most often minimal or even none. As these cases concern phenomena linked to a certain status group, this group can easily "not notice" the criticism because it is sure that no one—neither the Constitution nor the President—can force it to "pay attention." The way, in which the media are treated by the powers-that-be can be felt at all levels, where officials and functionaries of various ranks treat the public opinion in the same way. Moreover, journalists themselves oftentimes criticize different phenomena being aware of the uselessness and ineffectiveness of their criticism, hence the numberless exaggerations, distortions, interpretations made by them.

Obviously, one cannot ignore the conditions, in which our media have to operate; one may not place too many demands on the media operating in a society of poverty, corruption and rampant crime—in a "status" society. The financial possibilities of our publications are extremely low, journalist salaries are laughable, while the amount of work is enormous.

Circulation, formulas, professionalism

While I was preparing this article I ran across a fact that may seem natural to publishers and perhaps is natural in a market economy—as it is understood in Moldova—but I was surprised by it, even shocked. I don't know whether the so-called "trade secret" is being kept as strictly in other areas as well as the case is among those who know very well what it's like not to have access to the information you need. I have the impression that our journalists are not more open than those whom they are trying to teach democracy and transparency. None of the editors I contacted was willing to tell me the circulation of his newspaper. Neither at Posta Moldovei nor at the Universul Printing House was I able to find out this information; I was told that such information falls under some provisions concerning the trade secret and that this "is a matter of court decisions." I would be curious to know how circulation works as a trade secret. Perhaps only if it conceals fraud.

The first thing that has to be mentioned concerning newspapers in Moldova is that they lack a clear profile, a

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well-outlined personality and that, on the other hand, there are no publications that could be called incontestable leaders. Just as in the case of many parties in our country—they share very similar doctrines but this does not foster unification or at least conciliation—our newspapers resemble each other very much, starting with the ideology they promote and ending with their style, which, however, does not make the mutual antipathy among journalists weaker.

One other distinct peculiarity of the printed press in our country is their heterogeneous character, the eclecticism of their approach. It is difficult to understand at what audience they are aiming, as it seems that the principle guiding them is "something for everyone." Looking at their first pages, it seems that newspapers are trying to suggest that they are first of all social-political publications that strive to seriously inform the public opinion about current affairs and the problems of society. But if one looks starting from the last page, where one can find information about the lives of national and especially international stars, which is presented so superficially and frivolously, the newspaper starts resembling a tabloid. As one works his way deeper into the newspaper, whether front to back or back to front, the confusion persists. One will find stories on the economy and politics of the country, aimed at a more or less informed reader, as well as pages dedicated to skin care or how to court a woman; articles about life in villages, written so as to be understood by peasants, will alternate with essays on postmodernism reprinted from foreign publications; the gardener's page will be next to the page dedicated to devout Christians, which in turn will be next to stories about occult sciences, fortune telling, astrology and the ubiquitous TV listings. It is not the composite formula that is disturbing but rather the lack of a spirit of unity.

If we are trying to speak seriously about politics, then we should keep the same tone and the same approach in the case of other topics and subjects, and vice-versa—if it is an easy, entertaining tone that we want, then we should be consistent in all subjects. In reality though, it seems that each page is a newspaper in itself, with its own style, its own tone, etc. How much credibility will a serious reader give to the analyses and commentaries on the first page when on the following pages he will read stories that border on the vulgar?

This tendency to cover all represents a conceptual confusion, the desire to recruit as many readers as possible; this is also due to the fact that most of the Romanian-language newspapers are published once a week.

One has the impression that publications aim at an indiscriminating reader, whose background is somewhat below the average, although, as I said above, one can sometimes find in a newspaper for peasants essays on the end of history or on the Western cultural elites. An opinion poll conducted by a newspaper among its readers

showed that almost half of them were young or very young. In this respect the "pizza" concept promoted by our newspapers is perfectly in tune with the "transition age" of teenagers, when the cult for Eminescu's "Lucafarul" can be perfect friends with the adoration of Britney Spears. But if I think of some publications in Bucharest, which introduce themselves as "very serious" and nevertheless do not hesitate to publish ads advertising "hot women from Oltenia," then I should think that our publications "are doing fine." But I will find comfort in the idea that by producing such cocktails we prove our belonging to the common Balkan pattern, where the sublime gets mixed with the derisory. This is a typical temptation for newspapers with very different ideologies, for example such as those that are declared anti-Romanian papers (*Saptamana*), party newspapers (*Lucafarul*), as well as the pro-Romania ones (*Flux*, *Timpul*, *Jurnal de Chisinau*). The impression of "kitsch" is strengthened by the page design too, where a "color glutton" feels at home.

The "serious" department of the Romanian-language publications has much to improve from a different point of view. Commentaries, investigations, analyses are almost totally absent here. But if there is a political commentary, it is most often biased, while the economic commentary oscillates between priggishness, bias, and amateurism. What newspapers publish in terms of journalistic genres could be all included in a "roomy" and diffuse term—"article."

The tone of the newspapers is not analytically detached, descriptive, reporting, but it is rather emotionally colored, comprised on a sentimental scale between meaningfully talkative and bitterly alarmed, as if the reporters and commentators were speaking to people they know, people who need not be persuaded of anything because they unconditionally share the authors' opinions. Even the political and economic commentaries betray the authors' emotional involvement.

The Russian-language publications are separated off in our newspaper landscape by their "cooler" design and much smaller interest for the intimate lives of stars. They have preserved the style of the former times, thus being in unison with the Moscow-based newspapers. To be sure, they do not have the qualifications and style of the latter.

In a country torn apart by contradictions, with a society smothered by poverty and a minority of cynical rich, with a democratic opposition that has missed democracy and a mediocre communist government, with villages that watch the state television and cities that read local newspapers and watch foreign television—in this country the printed press contribute first of all to confusion, bitterness and mediocrity. This is the picture of a community, which is not able to become aware of and model its own condition, a community crushed by its own impotence.

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The Press in Transnistria

Andrei SAFONOV

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The territorial-political split of the former Soviet Moldova is more than ten years old. A lot of things have happened in the meantime: confrontation, a real war with horror and blood, euphoria from the multiple beginnings of a dialog and disappointment from setbacks. And the Transnistrian press have always followed carefully this “ninth wave” of events, interpreting them depending on their social-political orientation.

What is then the press in the (self-proclaimed—ed.note) Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (PMR)?

In order to answer this question, we have first of all to clarify the nature of the Transnistrian information market.

As it is well known, a general discussion of the Transnistrian autonomy, and later independence started in the summer and autumn of 1989. At that moment in time the left bank of the Nistru river and the right-bank city of Bender (which became part of PMR on 2nd September 1990) was a mostly industrial region. Tiraspol, which between 1929 and 1940 was the capital of the Moldovan Autonomous Region in Ukraine, was now simply a “city of republican jurisdiction.” The city’s intellectual potential (I mean the intellectuals in the humanities) started in the late ‘40s to be regularly lured to Chisinau and Odessa. This, of course, had an impact on the state of the press.

In the late ‘80s-early ‘90s the Transnistrian press represented newspapers published in various towns and districts, lacking a region-wide publication. The most popular were *Dnestrovskaia Pravda* (Tiraspol) and *Pobeda* (Bender). Practically all publications were run by the party, whose influence had weakened considerably by 1990 due, among other reasons, to the amorphous position of the CPSU, which was linked to Mikhail Gorbachev’s personality.

The proclamation of PMR’s autonomy led to a polarization of the Transnistrian media: while the newspapers in towns generally supported the events of 2nd September 1990, a number of regional publications, which were oriented towards the villages that wanted to remain under Chisinau’s jurisdiction, formed an opposition to the official Tiraspol. Such a situation could be seen for instance in Dubasari, where one could see the PMR flag in green-and-red above the city council and the Moldovan flag in red-yellow-blue above the district council.

Purely political publications started appearing, too: starting in August 1989 the Joint Council of Workers (OSTK) published *Bastuiuschii Tiraspol* (which later became *Trudovoi Tiraspol*). The supporters of a unified Moldova

answered by starting the *Tighina* newspaper, which was published in Bender till the summer of 1992. The publications of big enterprises were also used in this political fighting: in the summer of 1989 the *Rybnitskii Metallurg* newspaper made public the program of the Edinstvo political movement.

Given the critical stance of a number of publications controlled by the CPSU towards the formation of PMR, the Transnistrian activists tried to fill the information space. Thus, on 28th June 1990 the first issue of *Novoe Vremia* was published in Bender (this was the publication of the city council), and *Pobeda* (published by the city executive) lost its readers, many of whom were subscribers. On the other hand, *Dnestrovskaia Pravda* (Tiraspol), which was edited by Alexei Pechul, actively supported the creation of PMR and there was no need to create an alternative printed organ.

Somewhat later two events influenced the development of the media in Transnistria.

First, the events of August 1991 led to the dissolution of the Communist Party, and the disappearance of purely party publications such as *Pobeda* in Bender. As a consequence, the media supporting the creation of PMR were able to strengthen their positions.

Second, the war of March-June 1992 led to the disappearance from the PMR territory of publications supporting a unified Moldova. At the same time, the dual jurisdiction was liquidated in such communities as Dubasari: the district council, which advocated the preservation of the Chisinau jurisdiction, moved to Nistru’s right bank.

Thus, the years 1992-1993 can be considered a period of relatively stable formation of the Transnistrian information space. In 1992 the Transnistrian radio and TV went on air; also, the news agency Olvia Press appeared. During that period, as if competing with Chisinau, the authorities in Transnistria promoted the thesis of a larger democracy and deeper market reforms than in Moldova. Thus, in March 1993 the PMR Supreme Soviet adopted the Law on Print and other Media, which was largely copied from its Russian counterpart. This law still functions today, although powers supporting President Igor Smirnov are trying to change it towards closer and stronger control of the media by the power.

The year 1993 saw a confrontation between the commander of the 14th Russian Army General Alexander Lebed and the PMR authorities, who were accused by the General—popular among the Transnistrian population—of corruption and fraud. The authorities found themselves in a difficult situation: the PMR radio and TV were not yet very effective in their influence, and the *Dnestrovskaia Pravda* newspaper, which de facto had become a general Transnistrian publication, actively supported Lebed in his accusations. Besides, the General had two more information

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aces: the army publication *Soldat Otechestva*, which used to be a small, very specialized paper, started to have large print runs, and the people of Transnistria also had the possibility to watch ARM-TV, whose programs were also full of exposes. The power of the PMR President Igor Smirnov came under real threat, especially given the fact that in Transnistria one could freely buy—even during the armed conflict of 1992—a whole range of newspapers from Moldova, including *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, *Tara*, etc.

The situation changed in May 1995. This was conditioned by two factors. First, the local elections in Tiraspol in 1995 were won by the radical left headed by Vasili Yakovlev, who was then Smirnov's right hand in his struggle against democrats in general and supporters of Lebed in particular. Second, Lebed was ordered back to Moscow. Soon afterwards, he resigned as army commander and became actively involved in politics.

Encouraged by those changes, Transnistrian authorities launched a counter attack. *Soldat Otechestva* cut down its circulation dramatically, stopped discussing political problems, disappeared from news-stands and became once again a typical army publication. In 2001, Moscow simply stopped funding the newspaper. ARM-TV dramatically cut down on its air time and also stopped covering politics. Today it is watched by no more than 2% of the inhabitants of Tiraspol, let alone the inhabitants of other communities across Transnistria. Finally, in late May 1995, the Tiraspol city council dismissed Alexei Pechul as editor of *Dnestrovskaia Pravda*. This experienced editor was kept away from journalism for some years: between 1995-98 he worked in the personnel department of a Tiraspol factory.

At the same time, the authorities started creating Transnistria-wide publications. The government and the Supreme Soviet started publishing *Pridnestrovie* newspaper; the Trade Unions' Federation of Transnistria published *Profsoiuznye Vesti*.

One might say that 1995-97 represented a period, during which Igor Smirnov's team monopolized the Transnistrian information space. In electronic media this monopoly was strengthened when the Sheriff firm set up a TV network with the same name. This network started broadcasting a package of over 20 channels, most of them from Russia. But the fact of the matter was that if the authorities so desired, any channel or any inconvenient program could be easily thrown out of the broadcast. A telling example was a story about corruption and crime among Transnistrian authorities, which was broadcast on 25th November 2001 by RTR's news program "Vesti." This program, which revealed, in particular, that PMR was supplying arms to Chechnya, as well as the ownership of real estate in Cyprus as a backup, should Smirnov's power fall, was simply "blocked" by a movie, *Twin Peaks*, for that "inconvenient" story could shake Smirnov's position just before the PMR presidential elections planned for 9th December.

But towards 1998 opposition media started gaining strength. In the Rybnitsa district of Transnistria the newspaper *Dobryi Den* was (and still is) active; this was a

publication of democratic orientation. The authorities sued the newspaper several times, trying to undermine its financial foundation. But the newspaper, published and edited by Sergei Kotovski, survived.

The State Committee for Information and the Press (currently Transnistrian Ministry of Information and Telecommunications) registered on 27th March 1998 an independent publication, *Novaia Gazeta*, which was founded by two individuals—political scientists Grigori Volovoi and Andrei Safonov. The Transnistrian authorities saw that the newspaper quickly acquired an audience and the authorities tried to violate the Law on Print and Other Media; this law provided for the cancellation of a newspaper's registration only by a court decision. But the relevant minister Boris Akulov issued two ordinances: to suspend and later to cancel the registration of *Novaia Gazeta*. Since both ordinances were unlawful, they failed to achieve the expected effect and the newspaper continued publication with a continuously increasing circulation. Then the authorities turned to forceful measures.

Through the period January-August 1999 the PMR Ministry of State Security confiscated many issues and blueprints of *Novaia Gazeta* without any documents authorizing them to do so; the confiscations took place right on the territory of the Tipar printing house, where the newspaper was printed. At the same time, the newspaper's financial activities were checked by various state bodies, but all was in vain. They failed to find even the smallest violations.

The founders took their case to court and won at all levels. The Panel of the Arbitration Court of Transnistria put a stop to it in January 2000. In order to honor their obligations before subscribers, the founders started publishing in September 1999 *Samaia Novaia Gazeta*, keeping the style and orientation of *Novaia Gazeta*, but only in runs of 1000 copies—the laws in Transnistria allowed the publication of periodicals of up to 1000 copies without registration.

In the spring of 2000 local elections were to take place in Transnistria. Given the fact that *Samaia Novaia Gazeta* was a popular newspaper, the Ministry of Security performed several new confiscations; in March 2000 *Samaia Novaia Gazeta* closed down, but in August 2000 *Novaia Gazeta* resumed its publication. It is being published to the present day.

The opposition on the left of Transnistria's political spectrum started publishing the *Glas Naroda* newspaper. It was founded by the Party of People's Power and the movement "Power to the People! For Social Justice!" This newspaper launched attacks on the authorities from the platform of supporters of pre-Gorbachev socialism. When on 10th September 2001 the campaign for presidential elections started in Transnistria, the authorities decided it was time to crack down on this publication. In October 2001, following the worst traditions of Soviet times, a "letter from the workers" was produced, which was signed by the workers from the Tipar printing house in Tiraspol. In that letter the

workers declared that they refused to print such an “anti-popular” and “anti-presidential” newspaper. One may conjecture that the letter was written by the PMR Ministry of State Security.

Since the other printing houses in Transnistria also refused to print *Glas Naroda* after they had received tacit orders to that effect, the newspaper had to be printed in Chisinau by the Universul printing house. On 14th November a print run of 19,000 copies was confiscated by the authorities on the Bender border crossing. Such a scenario was expected. As of 27th November 2001, *Glas Naroda* didn't resume its publication.

A chunk of the Transnistrian information market is taken up by shopper publications such as *Yarmarka*, *Makler*, *Vse*, *Mir Komputero*, etc.

Since mid-1990s publications from Moldova practically stopped their distribution in Transnistria. According to a number of analysts, the Transnistrian authorities wanted to control their information space more than before. However, on 16th May 2001 the presidents of Moldova and Transnistria, Vladimir Voronin and Igor Smirnov, signed an agreement on unhindered mutual distribution of the media on both banks of the Nistru river. The most important clause in this document was that Transnistrian media could be

distributed in Moldova without registration and vice-versa. However, Moldovan media never appeared on the Transnistrian market.

At present Transnistria is much behind Moldova—not to speak about Russia and Ukraine—regarding the development of independent media. There are no independent broadcast media; from the newspapers covering social-political issues only *Dobryi Den* and *Novaia Gazeta* survived as of early December 2001, but the former is distributed only within the Rybnitsa district of Transnistria.

The supporters of the current PMR President Igor Smirnov are trying to gain control over the entire information space of Transnistria and, therefore, insist on a new version of the Law on Print and Other Media. One of their “innovations” is to ban individuals from founding media organizations, cancel the right to publish a newspaper of less than 1000 copies without registration, forbid people without higher education in journalism to edit newspapers, etc. One can draw a sound conclusion that the result of the struggle around this law will define not only the direction, in which the PMR media will develop but also the development of democracy in Transnistria as a whole. ■

Business

The Burden of the Press: Hard to Carry, Pity to Drop

Ion CORETCHI,
Editor-in-chief, Delovaia Gazeta

The economic environment, in which the printed press operate, resembles a famous tragic-comical case of a passenger with a trunk whose handle suddenly fell off: it's difficult to carry, it's a pity to leave behind. It is in this situation that for many years founders, publishers, and editors have found themselves, when they carry this uncomfortable, heavy load—a newspaper—that, as it seems, nobody needs; they carry it while everyone around them only hinders, pushes them around, abuses them verbally, or even tries to make them trip. The main initiator of all this mess is the government, which has still not made up its mind whether it needs independent media or whether it can do with its own, governmental printed media, which have to operate in the same shocking environment, only rarely receiving alms from the government budget. But the case is rather that the government does not even have to make a choice. It could easily do with just two publications of its own, as the independent media tend only to hinder wise governing by swarming like gadflies in the government's face and in the face of its bodies populated by bureaucrats and fat corrupt

officials. This unspoken view lies at the basis of how the press in general—and the printed ones in particular—are perceived. But this attitude is not for the public eye; it is only for internal use. Hence the dual attitude towards the press: on the one hand, it is reverential and respectful, and, on the other hand, it resembles the famous words of Onegin about his ill uncle: “when will the Devil finally come and take you with him?” And this “know how” has not just been invented by those who are at the top of the power pyramid today; it is rather a joint product that has been improved over the years by all those who have contributed their own bricks to it.

The utter impoverishment of the population during the transition period is perhaps the most important economic factor that needs to be noted today. Newspapers, radio and television stations slowly but surely were losing their readers, listeners and viewers. While in the case of radio and television this happened due to the lack of electricity and means of news delivery to every house and did not have direct financial consequences, say lack of subscriptions, then in the case of the printed press a catastrophe happened. Penury scythed down newspaper circulations; it also led to the closing and disappearance of a large number of newspapers—regional, district, city and national ones.

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Let's try and see what economic factors have such a negative impact on the well-being of newsrooms. It is a known fact that life has become more expensive and so have the factors that influence the cost of a newspaper. Journalists and publishers would be happy to sell their newspapers at the same symbolic price as during the Soviet times—two kopecks—but life simply does not allow that. First of all, journalists have become more interested in the monetary value of their labor. Even though they are nowhere close to stardom, they no longer want to work for a symbolic pay as back in the times of socialism. They demand a good salary, preferably in hard currency. If this is not possible, then sorry... Of course, here and there one can still find enthusiasts who are ready to work for pennies, but they do this partially because no one has come around to tag their real price on them yet. The market of journalistic labor is quite limited. The places have already been distributed, and the lucky ones are holding tight to their warm places. Those left overboard also want a sweet life, and they dictate their own conditions when they can. Hence the high prices. This, of course, affects a newspaper's budget. Without serious salaries it is practically impossible to start a new publication. But this increases the publication cost to unimaginable heights. But let's assume the issue of journalist salaries has been solved. Now the publisher has a different headache—current operational costs.

Another economic factor that has a negative impact on press development is the constantly increasing prices for newsprint and printing services. This is a real scourge for newspapers, which annuls their efforts to save on costs and build a reasonable budget. Yes, Moldova has to import newsprint. This is a strategic commodity. And it is being taxed by the supplier with various levies. That's why its price in Moldova can reach astronomical amounts. And no light can be seen in this tunnel, not even if one tries and reduces costs. Except for the case when the government, which also uses the benefits of printed products, will pay special attention to the issue of newsprint imports and discuss this issue separately with other parties. This is possible to achieve, should there be will, but... it is enough to remember the government's attitude to the press, mentioned above. During one meeting of journalists, my colleagues mentioned a different way of solving this problem—exempting importers from the domestic VAT, which will bring down the price of newsprint. But who will ever want to do this?

One should add to the factors that influence negatively the state of the mass media the unhealthy economic-legal environment, in which the media have to operate. Every newspaper and magazine newsroom, every radio and TV station of various forms of ownership represents an economic unit, which operates inside a general framework of the Budget Law, tax rules and other regulations. These laws have a fiscally repressive character, and their main goal is to squeeze all businesses dry. And so they do. Take the country's main economic law—the budget for 2001. You are familiar with it and you have probably noticed such a queer

thing: the lion's share of revenues has to be accumulated on account of fiscal operations, taxes and payments and not on account of production and sale of goods. But the country should not generate its wealth through taxes and levies! Even back in his times Pushkin understood this: remember how his Evgenii Onegin “could judge the ways for a country to grow rich, and how't should live and why no gold it will need when SIMPLE MERCHANDISE IT KEEPS.” In our case simple merchandise means newspapers, which are difficult to produce under such fiscal pressure, and whatever is being produced is difficult to sell. Why? Because the people have no money for shows and reading!

For curiosity's sake, let's list just several tax payments, to which a business, such as a newspaper, is subject. For instance, a newspaper is only receiving money, and the state coffer has already sliced off five percent. Then social security levies follow, with the Social Fund taking 31%. Also here are included the income tax and the pension fund, which together represent a heavy burden for the newspaper. Some may say that this is a sacred duty. I agree. But why does the government take away 31 percent from those who produce—since journalists and newspapers as a whole produce a commodity—and give paltry for pensions and other social needs. Usually, journalists who reach retirement age receive the minimal pension, which bears no comparison with the disbursements newspapers—and especially successful ones—make.

VAT is another sacred duty. Therefore, it is in turns either being lifted from the media or “forgotten” on the media, depending on the good will of the upper circles of government towards the media and on the media's services in pushing various candidates through to the coveted position. At present the media are exempt from VAT payments. But this exemption has been made with such explanations and conditions, that media managers are still not clear about whether to pay it or not. The fact is that the preamble to the conditions under which the media were exempted last year from VAT was composed in such a way that it was impossible to understand it. Additional explanatory letters on the issue only compounded the problem. To the present day the Ministry of Finances has not yet issued clear criteria regarding exactly which media are exempted from VAT. So we are waiting to see during the next audit by the tax authorities what the inspector will utter—guilty or not of VAT evasion.

According to the same budget law, the newspaper has to pay customs tax for imported newsprint, a tax for roads, a property tax, one for advertising, one for street cleaning, one for water and sewage, etc., etc. In short, newspapers and magazines have to pay all this in full to the government, while our dear government remembers of the institute of the press only in the most critical moments—floods, catastrophes, and, of course, elections. It is during this period that newspapers acquire their weight and price, and payments come accordingly.

One other “partner,” who does his best alongside the

government to smother the media, is the state-owned enterprise Posta Moldovei. It has led its continuous “war” against the media since its inception, performing twice a year—during the two subscription periods—cavalry attacks on tariffs. The post people always calculate their tariffs for press delivery by applying the highest quotient of profitability for themselves. Calculations include the cost of new uniforms for postmen, the purchase of new bags, price hikes for oil derivatives, electricity, the purchase of new equipment and many other things they need but which are burdensome for any newspaper. This practice exists to the present day and has acquired the status of a governmental decision by which such calculations are being approved. Thus, to deliver a newspaper from Chisinau to any district of the country, the “partner” takes as much as the price of the newspaper. And these innovations are being introduced step by step with every new subscription period. Any proposals from journalists to find a compromise shatter against the rigid decisions that Posta Moldovei takes. To be sure, one has to mention the lack of unity and the inertia of journalists when it comes to this issue. Many newspapers agree to bow their heads in front of the “partner” and pay insane amounts just to avoid arguments with the monopoly holder.

So, these are the conditions of existence, which erode the foundation supporting the material basis of many newspapers. Therefore, it is not surprising that each time one can see in news-stands fewer and fewer familiar publications, while many professional journalists change their occupation giving up their once-beloved profession. Thus, the problem

today is as follows: will we, journalists, carry that trunk to its destination or will we chuck it away because it is no longer needed? And should we carry it through, why do we have to do it at a cost of an unimaginable heroic effort? Why is it that the content and publication of a newspaper is the prerogative and headache only of the publisher and the editor, while all sorts of institutes of power seem to have chosen as their goal the extermination of businesses—whether these are newspapers or a stand selling household items? During these years of democratic effort society, and especially the power, has not understood that the media represent a special phenomenon, which should not be treated like everything else. And that they need help at the level of the government in the form of a special governmental program that would treat all newspapers equally and not separate them by party color, ownership, or by the softness of the editor’s back. Such a need has arisen long ago in our country, where newspapers give in one after another, are being sold for pennies or simply close down. Should a Ltd company producing brooms close down, society will not notice—it will live with it or it will go to neighbors to buy brooms. But should a Ltd company producing a newspaper die, society will lose one more source of information, one more of its advocates. Of course, this can go unnoticed too, as it happens in our country. Isn’t this the reason why we take our main news and information from foreign sources—foreign newspapers, TV and radio channels? Isn’t this a reason to be worried?

The Newspaper as a Business

Petru MACOVEI,

Coordinator, Association of Independent Press

The independence of the press is not an illusion, nor is it an abstract category. It represents an objective that can be reached, but of course not without sacrifice. The sacrifice is material, and not everyone can take it. As long as money, public functions, social position do not represent ends in themselves for editors, their newspapers can become truly independent, that is they can ensure the verity of the facts presented and the freedom of commentary. The experiments we have had in the last decade in our central press have shown how fragile the freedom of expression is and how easily free expression can be smothered. Newspapers that declared themselves independent suspended their activity sooner or later, or were “swallowed up” by political or economic structures, whether private or state-owned. Many of the journalists who were not politically or economically engaged had to adjust to the new rules of the game and give up their profession. Thus, the current media

environment is not really propitious for the consolidation of an independent press.

Things are not much better in the province, especially if we take into account the fact that frequently, besides financial difficulties newspapers have to put up with the arrogance and dictatorial tendencies of local public officers. Nevertheless, there are good newspapers across counties, which offer their readers unbiased information without having to become enslaved to the power (be it political power or that of an economic group). Their circulations are often higher than the circulations of many national publications, and hence the impact of their stories is greater. How do these newspapers survive? The “miracle” can be explained by the fact that the publication of a newspaper is seen as a business. And it is not seen just like any business but like one with profound ethical implications that leave no room for the manipulation of facts and truth. In order to publish a truly independent newspaper, it is necessary to have a very skillful manager and a good team of journalists. Thus, the product, i.e. the newspaper, will be of good quality, and this will ensure its

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success with the public; on the other hand, the newspaper will be insured financially too, by advertising contracts and editorial services secured by their managers.

The most successful case of survival among the free local press is that of *Unghiul* in Ungheni county. Besides the fact that this newspaper is interesting for readers, the paper's financial management may be envied by other newspapers. *Unghiul* seems to be the only newspaper in Moldova, which used its own profits to buy an apartment for its office. The salaries paid here are much higher than in other county publications, while the circulation reaches beyond six thousand copies. These achievements would not be so impressive if we didn't take into account the fact that the newspaper is not funded by political or economic structures, nor does it apply for any grants. How do they do it? They focus on new information and on information with an immediate or future social impact. In business they rely on contracts profitable for the paper, regardless of who the partner is: business X, the town or county administration, or a private individual.

Unghiul's experience of cohabitation with the Ungheni public administration has been interesting. Since the county was created as a territorial-administrative unit, the newspaper criticized unsparingly the way public money was managed and the abuses public officers committed. *Unghiul* wrote promptly and fairly about the apartment bought for an official in the management of the local police department, about traffic accidents involving the official car of the County Council president, about the fact that the wives of Council leaders went shopping in their husbands' cars, that the cars of county councilors trampled the lawn in front of the administration building, etc. The Ungheni County Council tried to fix their image by starting a publication of their own, but it is not popular with readers. Finally, the county administration was dismissed. In Ungheni people already know that the newspaper *Unghiul* represents a force by the impact it has on readers. The new council members have understood that it is better for them to cooperate with the media. The council paper was closed down and the administration made contracts with the independent newspaper concerning the publication, for pay, of articles about the activity of the council and the decisions it adopts. Similar contracts have been signed with the County Executive and the City of Ungheni. But this does not mean that public officers are no longer criticized when they deserve it. The newspaper staff are determined to tell their readers only the truth, even if this may lead to losing a few good contracts.

I spoke about the newspaper in Ungheni as a model of survival in the case of the independent press in the circumstances when the political and economic realities do not help at all in strengthening the freedom of the written word. In other counties, too, there are publications that have achieved the same good level of

performance, both in terms of the quality of articles and design. *Cuvantul* in Rezina, *Observatorul de Nord* in Soroca and *Ora Locala* in Ialoveni are regional publications, which are better than newspapers distributed nationally. However, these and other local papers do not have a financial situation that would make them feel secure in the future. The problem is, on the one hand, poor management and, on the other hand, problems with the local post offices. By virtue of the "tradition" based, it seems, on the patriarchal way of life in Moldovan villages, the postman has always been a strategic element when it comes to subscription. The newspapers, which have understood this and managed to interest the post offices, are doing well, their circulations increasing even though the publication itself may not be very good. Those who could not find common ground with the post people have circulations under a thousand. And the circulation, as we all know, is an ace when it comes to attracting advertising and signing other kinds of contracts. This is why we need to speed up the process of setting up an alternative mail distribution system in our country.

If the governing party votes for the old administrative-territorial system based on districts, it will also set up district newspapers, and this will create additional problems for the local independent media. Competition in the newspaper business is a good thing, because it stimulates quality. On one condition though: competition should be fair. It is to be expected, however, that the new publications will be funded from the public budget, while subscription will be based on the Soviet-style "voluntary-compulsory" principle. The possible return to districts will sweep the ground from under the feet of some free county publications, which have invested great effort to impose themselves as regional publications and secure subscriptions in the entire county (this is the case of *BusinessInfo*, Cimislia, Lapusna county; *Ora Locala*, Ialoveni, Chisinau county; *Cuvantul*, Rezina, Orhei county). *Accent provincial* (which is a good newspaper with as good an intellectual potential) had to move from the town of Glodeni to Balti. Now these newspapers will have to either go back to covering only their administrative districts (which means a smaller circulation) or to continue publishing in three or four districts, as they have done so far. This latter option will be difficult to implement, especially given the reorganization of the current county post offices.

If we add to all this the extremely tough pricing policy applied by Posta Moldovei to newspapers, plus printing services and newsprint, which are extremely expensive, we will see that the regional and local independent press face not such a rosy future. ■

The Letter of the Law

Reflections on the Implementation of the Access to Information Law in Moldova

*Olivia PIRTAC, Coordinator,
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More than a year has passed since the Access to Information Law came into force.¹ At first the bill had to be promoted, and now the law has to be promoted. Journalists and people are reminded again and again of the value of this acquisition. This law is spoken about as a great achievement in the spirit of democracy. It is also said that Moldova is one of the few Central and Eastern European countries to have such a law. But when we look at how it is implemented, all we hear is silence. One nearly has the impression that the law is being completely respected and no one has any complaints. But is this law actually respected in Moldova?

The problem of Moldova is that people here are not aware that they need information and that they have to fight for it. We are extremely tolerant and we find it absolutely normal for authorities to work in secrecy. The public officer, on the contrary, goes to work every day believing he has to protect information and not offer it to people. This is a hold-over from the old regime, a cult of secrecy, and we tend to be more surprised by publicity than by closed meetings.

There is one more reason: in our society the public officer is not regarded as a servant of the people but rather as a person who holds power. Correspondingly, he can influence the fate of the ordinary citizen who, in turn, feels aware of the power of the public officer and sees himself as "subordinated" to him. I would like to illustrate this mentality by an example, which is based on a real case: A mass media organization made a few inquiries with the tax authority in the community where it was published. The reaction was typical for the "real" transparency that exists in our country: "Why should we give you this information?" The journalists replied: You know, the Access to Information Law... The tax authority did not object, saying instead: "All right, then, but you know it's been a while since we last time audited your agency, so we'll come next week."

In circumstances when there is no liability for violating a law it would be normal for such a law to be ineffective. But this is not the case of the Access to Information Law. The Code of Administrative Offenses contains an article that says that a public official who violates the legal provisions on protecting and ensuring the right to access information will be fined from 10 to 150 minimal salaries.³ When information is requested on healthcare, public security or environmental protection, and the refusal to provide such information causes considerable damage to the legal rights and interests of

the person requesting information, the refusal is liable to criminal prosecution and may result in a prison term of up to three years or in forbidding the violator to hold certain public positions or carry out certain activities for a period of up to five years.⁴ On the basis of the action in administrative litigation,⁵ the plaintiff may also claim monetary compensation for moral damages (in unlimited amount), which is an innovation for our legal system.

So the cause of the problem is not a gap in legislation. On the contrary, at the legislative level Moldova's status as a "democratic state" is confirmed almost definitively.

Even if some public officers have become aware of the fact that there is an Access to Information Law and that this law imposes a number of obligations on them, they regard the law as a burden. But normally in a healthy society such a law can be regarded only as a beneficial thing for all people: this law perfectly protects our rights, because this law is contributing to a transparent society in which we can learn what is happening around us and what we are to expect tomorrow. Any public institution, which respects the Access to Information Law, builds for itself a good reputation and a positive image in society. In the West very many public authorities try to offer to the public as much information as they can to show that they are transparent, thus gaining people's sympathy. The institution that offers more information is an institution that the population will trust.

Any person may be the beneficiary of this law, but it is especially beneficial to the mass media. Along this line of thought, one has to mention that the right to free opinion and expression is strongly linked to the right to be informed, for how could a person initiate public discussions of society's problems if such a person does not have access to the information concerning society's interests? At the same time, the Access to Information Law regulates access to the information that authorities already hold, and so no one may require authorities to find information they don't have.

The Access to Information Law also legalizes a person's right to truth. Every person has the right to know to what extent the environment in which he lives is polluted, whether the land on which he has built his house is subject to erosion, or about the rate at which crimes are solved in his community. An informed person is a strong person, an informed person will always have financial gain, will always be able to organize his work, so that all these things will work for him rather than against him.

Besides, information plays the role of public hygiene, because it stops corruption. Information also brings the people and the government closer, it provides for a

The Letter of the Law

continuous dialogue, which ensures that the government is constantly informed about the problems facing the population, and vice versa. More eloquent examples can be provided of how important the Law is and what a positive impact it has, but we have to continue examining this law. This is not a perfect law, perhaps because there are no perfect laws. But it is not perfect laws that we need: an imperfect law that works and offers people a certain right is better than a better law that is not being applied. Unfortunately, the problem in Moldova is the insufficient and inadequate application of good laws, one of which is the Access to Information Law. Thus, while before the law was adopted some institutions were afraid that they would be flooded by requests and this would hinder them in performing their current duties, after the law was adopted one can notice a rather surprising passivity in this respect and lack of any complaints on the part of public authorities concerning their inability to respond to an impressive number of requests or the inability to cover related expenses. To be sure, it is normal that the number of requests is low, for the average person has strictly defined interests and he does not have the time to simply test the Access to Information Law by asking questions he doesn't really care about. But there is one more reason: the mentality, which I mentioned at the beginning.

But let's go back to the law. The right to information has two elements: the right to access information held by public institutions and bodies, but also the positive obligation of the authorities to spread information about their functions and activities, as well as other information defined by law. For instance, the information supplier **has the obligation to disseminate** to the public at large information that has become known to it (even if no one requests such information) in the following cases: when such information a) can prevent or diminish a hazard for people's health and lives; b) can prevent or diminish the danger of any kind of damages; c) can stop the dissemination of false information or diminish the negative consequences of such dissemination; d) has a special social importance. One of the rationales for these provisions is to avoid situations similar to the Chernobyl disaster.

Concerning the right to access information, the following are obliged by law to offer information: **central and local public authorities** (parliament, the country's president, government, public administration [ministries, departments, local councils, cities, etc.], courts), **central and local public institutions** (organizations founded by the state in the person of a public authority and funded from the state budget, whose functions are administrative, social-cultural and other noncommercial ones), **individuals and legal entities** who, on the basis of the law or a contract with a public authority/institution are **authorized to manage public services** and gather, select, hold, keep, have official information, including personal data. According to the law, any citizen of Moldova or any person living in Moldova has the right to

request information. In the light of international standards, the fact that this right has not been offered to "any person" is a drawback of our law. Also, I don't think it is justifiable not to include legal entities. To be sure, a legal entity may be represented by an individual, but why should an individual request information on his behalf, as citizen, and not on behalf of the legal entity he represents? It is true that in art.1 (para.1.a) it is clear that the law intends to regulate "the relations between information suppliers and individuals and/or legal entities during the realization of the constitutional right to access information," but this intention is not fully confirmed in other provisions of the law, especially in art.5, which refers to the subjects of the law. Also, the law does not refer to the access by authorities, public institutions, individuals and/or legal entities authorized to manage public services to information held by similar entities, which, in my opinion, further reduces the law's possible benefits.

The law ensures access to official information (held by information suppliers and which has been developed, selected, processed, systematized and/or adopted by public bodies, officials or given to them under the law by other legal subjects), except for information defined as **state secret** and regulated by organic laws, confidential business information defined by laws on **trade secrets**, personal information whose disclosure is considered an **interference in one's private life**, certain categories of information related to **investigative activities**, information that represents final or intermediary results of scientific and technical research whose disclosure will deprive the authors of the research of their **privilege** of publication or influence negatively other rights protected by law. When only certain parts of a document may not be accessed, information suppliers are obliged to issue to the requesting party those parts of the document, access to which is under no restrictions according to current legislation, and label the omitted parts "state secret," "trade secret," "confidential personal information," etc. The Moldovan law has several provisions very well developed in the spirit of democracy, which stipulate that "no restrictions on the freedom of information will be imposed, unless the information supplier can prove that the restriction is regulated by organic law and is necessary in a democratic society for the protection of legitimate rights and interests or for national security, and that the damage caused to such interests will be greater than the public interest in such information" (art.7, para.4). No one may be liable on grounds of national security for making public certain limited information, if the disclosure of such information does not affect and cannot affect a legitimate interest of the national security or if the public interest in learning such information is greater than the effect of disclosing the information (art.7, para.5). Personal information may be accessed by the person in question, and by other persons upon agreement with the person in question, or if such information has been made public (published) in full prior

to the request. If the person, to whom the personal data refer, does not agree to their disclosure, such data may be accessed only upon a decision by a court of law, which has ruled that the disclosure will be in the public interest, i.e. will contribute to the protection of public health, public security, or the environment. One important element is that no one has an obligation to justify his or her interest for the requested information. Concerning terms, it will be considered that the supplier has fulfilled his obligations if he provides the requested information no later than 15 working days from the day, on which the request was registered.

The next question is, how can one contribute to the implementation of the Access to Information Law? I believe that we should not expect the law to work by itself; we have to fight for every right. It is necessary that a wronged individual be willing to defend his rights by trying to attract to his side nongovernmental organizations and the press. Individual efforts will not suffice for a global positive effect; it will take a united civil society supported by the media and by public bodies and institutions.

If we are to speak about implementation tactics applicable in Moldova, the first and the traditional one is education. It is necessary to educate the population, to raise its awareness and legal culture so that the average man may know that he has a right and can require others to respect it. Only an educated person is able to struggle consciously and fully for a right. Secondly, it is extremely important that information suppliers be educated, too. They have to be aware of their obligations, and it would be a good idea if they could fulfill these obligations by virtue of their own belief that it is their duty towards society to offer information and that this will not hurt them in any way. Such education may be conducted during seminars, courses, regular university lectures, but also through the media.

At the same time, it would be good to create precedents — they have a strong impact on democracy. For example, it would be good to take an eloquent case of refusing access to information, to sue the information supplier, to take the suit to the very end, and at the same time intensely cover the case in the media. Suing, winning the suit and covering the case in the media may be an important victory in the struggle for access to information. This will make public officers very careful when they are tempted to refuse access to certain information. The fear of responsibility is one of the main reasons, for which laws are respected. But even if court decisions are delayed, the coverage in the media of refusals to offer information, which (for any lawyer) is an obvious violation of the law, will have positive effects on the implementation of the law. In order to succeed in implementing the law the authorities may even have to be provoked to refuse, and then sued, criticized, for a tolerant society will never see its rights respected. Victories have an especially strong effect. Victories have to be created, for the population acquires confidence in a

certain right through victories.

At the end of this article I would like to cite a passage, which, I believe, says a lot about access to information and the need for its implementation: "Information is the oxygen of democracy. If people do not know what is happening in the society, in which they live, if the actions of those who govern them are hidden from them, they cannot participate meaningfully in the life of their community. But information is not needed only by citizens—it is also an essential element of a good government. A bad government needs secrets to be able to exist. It allows a quick development of inefficiency, corruption, and waste. As Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize winner for economy, said, there has never been a serious famine in a country with a democratic form of government and a relatively free press. Information allows people to examine scrupulously the actions of the government and represents the foundation of a fair, informed debate on those actions."⁶

1 The Law on Access to Information, No.982-XIV of 05.11.2000, *MO* 88-90 of 07.28.2000.

2 Georgio del Vecchio, *Lectii de filosofie juridica*. B. 1996, pp. 103-104.

3 The Code on Administrative Offenses of 03.29.1985, art.199/7 introduced by Law no.312-XV of 06.28.2001.

4 Criminal Code of 03.24.1961, art.140/4 introduced by Law no.312-XV of 06.28.2001.

5 The Law on Administrative Litigation No.793-XIV of 02.10.2000, *MO* 57-58 of 05.18.2000.

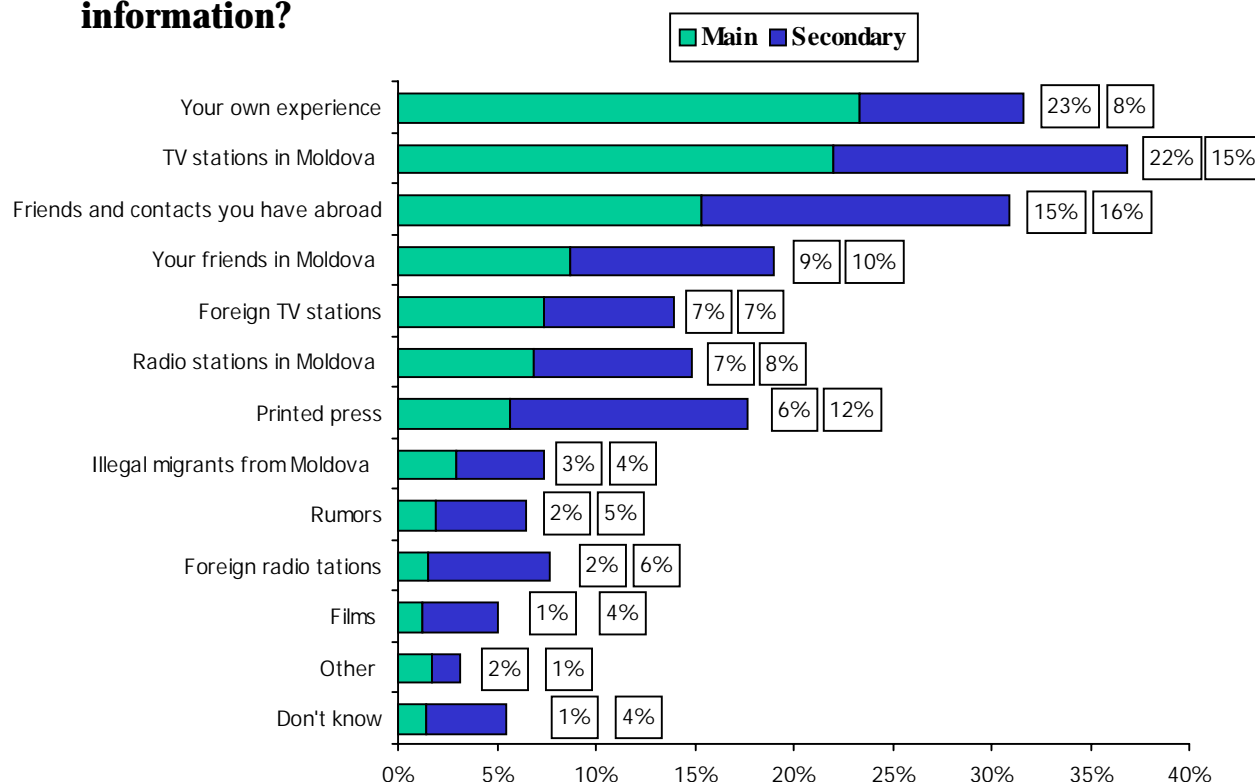
6 "The Right of the Public to Be Informed. Principles of the Legislation on the Freedom of Information," Article 19, London, June 1999, p.1.

Opinion Poll

How Are We Receiving Our Information?

Recently, under commission from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Center for Sociological, Political and Psychological Analysis CIVIS conducted a survey among adolescents and young women on migration and women trafficking. In their desire to find out an optimal way for distributing information aimed at this audience, the authors of the survey also asked questions concerning the mass media.

Figure 1. Which do you think are the most trustworthy sources of information?



From among the most trustworthy sources of information the respondents mentioned as their main source their own experience (23%) (Figure 1), TV stations in Moldova (22%), friends and contacts the respondents had abroad (15%).

The share of people who trust mostly their own experience prevails especially:

- Depending on the geographical area-in the north-26% (Table 6.1)
- Depending on age-in the age group 22-25-27%
- Depending on nationality-among the Gagauz, Bulgarians and people of other nationalities-29%
- Depending on education-among people who have higher education-34%
- Depending on occupation-among teachers and doctors-31%
- Depending on income-among people who have a monthly income of 401 lei and above-32%

The share of people who trust mostly TV stations in Moldova prevails especially:

- Depending on the geographical area-in the north-26%
- Depending on community-in rural areas-27%
- Depending on age-in the age group 14-17-25%
- Depending on nationality-among Ukrainians-25%
- Depending on education-among people who have completed secondary education-27%
- Depending on occupation-among school children-25%
- Depending on income-among people who have a monthly income between 1 and 50 lei-32%

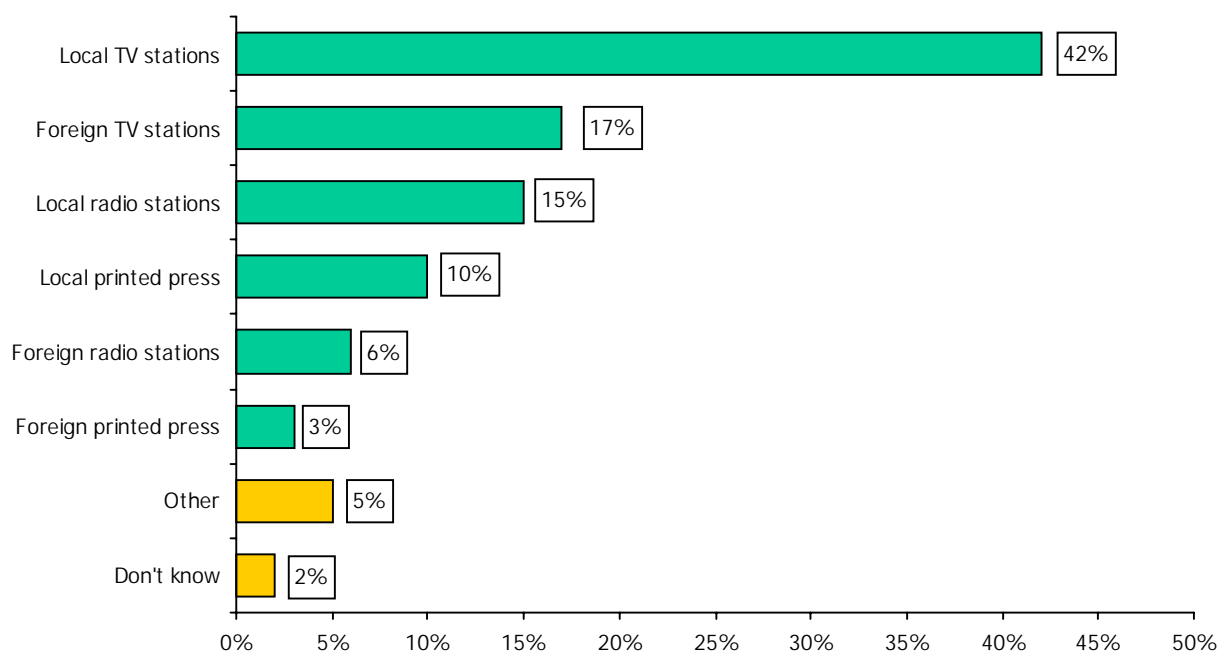
The share of people who trust mostly their friends and contacts abroad prevails especially:

- Depending on community-in the capital-26%
- Depending on nationality-among Russians-28%
- Depending on education-among people who have higher education-22%
- Depending on occupation-among people who answered "other"-25%
- Depending on marital status-among divorced and widowed women-23%
- Depending on income-among people who have a monthly income between 201 and 400 lei-20%

Table 1. Which do you think are the most trustworthy sources of information?

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1.	Your own experience													
2.	Friends and contacts you have abroad													
3.	Friends you have in Moldova													
4.	Radio stations in Moldova													
5.	TV stations in Moldova													
6.	Foreign radio stations													
7.	Foreign TV stations													
8.	Illegal migrants from Moldova													
9.	The printed press													
10.	Films													
11.	Rumors													
12.	Other													
13.	Don't know													
Total		23	15	9	7	22	2	7	3	6	1	2	2	1
Geographical area:	North	26	10	10	9	26	0	7	3	4	1	1	1	2
	Center	23	18	8	6	20	2	7	3	7	1	1	2	2
	South	20	16	8	8	22	2	9	3	6	2	6	1	1
Community:	Capital city	22	26	9	2	11	2	8	1	8	3		5	2
	Urban, except for Chisinau	25	17	9	6	19	1	8	3	6	0	2	1	1
	Rural	23	11	8	9	27	1	7	3	5	1	2	1	1
Age:	14-17	18	11	12	4	25	2	11	2	6	2	2	1	1
	18-21	25	14	6	8	24	2	8	4	3	1	2	2	2
	22-25	27	19	10	9	20	2	5	2	5	2	0	1	
	26-30	22	17	8	7	19	0	6	4	9	0	2	2	3
Nationality:	Moldovan (Romanian)	24	14	8	8	23	2	7	3	5	1	2	1	1
	Russian	20	28	9	1	12	3	11		8			7	
	Ukrainian	16	16	7	7	25		9	4	6	3	2	1	3
	Gagauz, Bulgarian, other	29	17	15	3	14	2	5	2	8		8		
Education:	Incomplete secondary	18	14	10	7	24	2	10	2	5	2	2	2	1
	Complete secondary	22	14	10	8	27	2	3	5	4	1	1	2	1
	Vocational	23	12	9	9	23	1	6	2	8	2	4	1	2
	Incomplete higher	24	19	9	4	19	1	10	5	6		1	1	1
	Higher	34	22	3	6	13	1	6	1	7		1	3	3
Occupation:	School student	20	12	11	4	25	2	11	3	6	2	2	1	
	University student	26	14	8	5	22	1	7	3	5	1	2	2	1
	Teacher or doctor	31	21	4	8	15		7	6	2		1	2	2
	Physical work, housewife	22	13	9	11	23	1	6	2	7	1	1	2	3
	Unemployed	24	16	11	9	18	2	6	3	3	2	5		2
	Other	19	25	5	4	25	2	5		11			3	
Marital status:	Single	24	15	9	5	22	2	8	3	5	1	2	2	1
	Married	23	16	7	10	22	1	6	3	6	1	2	2	1
	Divorced, widow	21	23	13	8	15	3		3	5		3		8
Income:	None	22	13	10	6	24	2	10	3	6	2	2	1	1
	1-50 lei	21	15	10	7	32	1	4	2	5	1	2	1	
	51-100 lei	20	15	8	8	19	3	7	5	8		3	3	3
	101-200 lei	22	17	11	9	21	1	10	2	2	2	1	1	2
	201-400 lei	23	20	8	7	22	1	5	2	7	1	3	1	2
	401 lei and above	32	19	5	7	13	1	5	3	6	1	2	4	3
Travel :	Have been abroad	25	17	7	6	20	2	10	2	7	1	1	2	1
	Have never been abroad	22	14	11	7	24	1	5	3	5	2	3	1	2

Opinion Poll

Figure 2. Which Mass Media do You Trust the Most?

Forty-two percent of the respondents named the Moldovan TV stations as their most trusted source of information. (Figure 2).

The share of people who have been of the same opinion prevails especially:

- Depending on the geographical area-in the north-49% (Table 2)
- Depending on community-in rural communities-48%
- Depending on education-among people who have completed their secondary education-50%
- Depending on income-among people who have a monthly income from 1 to 50 lei-50%
- Depending on whether they have been or not abroad-among people who have not been abroad-48%

17% of the respondents believe foreign TV stations are a trustworthy source.

This opinion prevails especially:

- Depending on community-in the capital-36%
- Depending on nationality-among Russian-26%
- Depending on education-among people with higher education-24%
- Depending on marital status-among divorced and widowed women-23%
- Depending on income-among people with a monthly income of 401 lei and above-25%
- Depending on whether they have been or not abroad-among people who have been abroad-23%

15% of the respondents said that the most trustworthy source of information are Moldovan radio stations. This opinion was shared especially by the respondents from the north of the country (21%).

Table 2.

Which mass media do you trust the most?

		Moldovan radio stations	Moldovan TV stations	Foreign radio stations	Foreign TV stations	Local printed press	Foreign printed press	Other	Don't know
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total		15	42	6	17	10	3	5	2
Geographic area:	North	21	49	6	11	7	3	3	1
	Center	11	37	8	21	11	4	7	2
	South	17	47	2	16	13	2	3	3
Community:	The capital	4	22	12	36	9	6	9	1
	Urban, except for Chisinau	16	45	4	16	11	4	3	1
	Rural	18	48	5	12	9	2	5	2
Age:	14-17	18	45	5	17	11	2	1	1
	18-21	14	43	4	16	11	5	5	2
	22-25	15	43	8	19	7	3	5	0
	26-30	15	38	7	16	11	2	7	3
Nationality:	Moldovan (Romanian)	16	44	5	16	10	3	5	2
	Russian	11	30	11	26	7	8	8	
	Ukrainian	14	44	10	16	10	1	5	
	Gagauz, Bulgarian, other	15	39	6	18	15	5		2
Education:	Incomplete secondary	16	43	6	16	12	3	3	1
	Complete secondary	17	50	5	12	6	3	5	2
	Vocational	17	43	6	15	13	2	2	2
	Incomplete higher	13	41	5	22	9	3	6	1
	Higher	8	30	9	24	10	5	11	3
Occupation:	School student	16	46	4	15	10	5	3	1
	University student	14	43	2	19	10	4	5	2
	Teacher or doctor	12	37	6	17	12	3	10	2
	Physical work, housewife	17	43	7	15	9	1	6	2
	Unemployed	16	44	7	20	9		2	2
	Other	10	32	13	18	12	8	4	3
Marital status:	Single	15	43	5	17	11	4	4	1
	Married	17	42	6	16	9	2	6	2
	Divorced, widow	8	41	13	23	5		8	3
Income:	None	16	45	5	17	10	3	4	1
	1-50 lei	16	50	5	8	12	2	5	2
	51-100 lei	15	46	5	15	9	3	4	3
	101-200 lei	15	42	3	19	11	3	5	2
	201-400 lei	15	41	8	15	11	4	5	2
	401 lei and above	11	29	11	25	8	5	8	3
Travel :	Have been abroad	13	36	7	23	10	4	6	2
	Have never been abroad	17	48	5	11	10	3	4	2

Opinion Poll

3. Which mass media do you use most frequently?

66% of the respondents use television most frequently as their source of information (Figure 3).

The share of people using television most frequently prevails especially:

- Depending on the geographical area-in the south-72% (Table 3)
- Depending on age-in the age group 26-30-70%
- Depending on nationality-among the Gagauz, Bulgarians and persons of other nationalities-70%
- Depending on education-among people with higher education-72%
- Depending on occupation-among teachers and doctors-70%
- Depending on marital status-among married women-71%

25% of the respondents use radio most frequently as their source of information.

The share of these people prevails especially:

- Depending on the geographical area-in the north-32%
- Depending on community-in urban areas other than Chisinau-29%

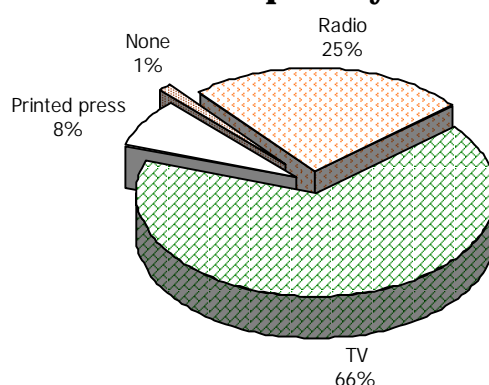


Figure 3.

Which mass media do you use most frequently?

- Depending on occupation-among university students-28%
- Depending on income-among people who have a monthly income between 51 and 100 lei-30%

Table 3. Which mass media do you use most frequently?

		Radio	TV	Print	None
		%	%	%	%
Total		25	66	8	1
Geographical area:	North	32	57	9	2
	Center	23	68	8	1
	South	19	72	8	1
Community:	Capital city	23	66	9	2
	Urban, except for Chisinau	29	61	8	1
	Rural	23	68	8	1
Age:	14-17	26	64	10	
	18-21	27	61	9	3
	22-25	26	69	5	1
	26-30	20	70	9	1
Nationality :	Moldovan (Romanian)	25	66	8	1
	Russian	27	65	7	1
	Ukrainian	22	66	13	
	Gagauz, Bulgarian, other	18	70	8	5
Education:	Incomplete secondary	26	63	10	1
	Complete secondary	27	67	4	3
	Vocational	26	64	9	1
	Incomplete higher	24	67	8	1
	Higher	17	72	10	1
Occupation:	School student	24	65	10	0
	University student	28	62	8	3
	Teacher or doctor	24	70	6	1
	Physical work, housewife	24	68	6	1
	Unemployed	26	66	7	1
	Other	22	65	12	2

Opinion Poll

Marital status:	Single	26	63	9	2
	Married	22	71	6	1
	Divorced, widow	26	67	5	3
Income:	None	23	68	9	1
	1-50 lei	23	66	10	
	51-100 lei	30	63	6	1
	101-200 lei	26	66	6	3
	201-400 lei	28	64	5	2
	401 lei and above	23	64	11	3
Travel :	Have been abroad	22	68	10	1
	Have never been abroad	28	64	6	2

The Law on Paper and in Reality

Vasile SPINEI

President, Center for Promoting Freedom of Expression and Access to Information

More than a year and a half has passed since the Law on Access to Information was adopted. This is a very important act, one of the first in the ex-Soviet space, whose main aim is to expand and deepen the transparency of the activity of public institutions/authorities, citizens' active involvement in the process of democratization of society, and the creation of a state of law.

Unfortunately, this law, which was developed in accordance with international standards, with assistance from experts from the USA and the Council of Europe, with the active participation of a number of bodies representing the civil society, is still at the initial stage of implementation. Just as before the law was adopted, the absolute majority of

the country's citizens do not know about and do not exercise their legitimate right to be informed and to request information on the day-to-day business of the authorities, while the public officers, and the power as a whole, prefer to cover their work in a veil of excessive secrecy.

The poll has been conducted by the Center for the Promotion of the Freedom of Expression and Access to Information.

Sample:

- * 253 journalists (of whom, 110 women)
- * from 83 independent, state-owned, party or social-political movement funded publications
- * from 10 counties, UTA Gagauzia, cities of Chisinau and Balti
- * from the national printed press
- * from the local printed press
- * from national broadcast media (radio / TV)
- * from local broadcast media (radio / TV)
- * from news agencies

The poll was conducted in September 2001

Table 1

From the factors listed below, which do you think influence the quality of and the promptness with which information is provided the most?

	%
The political party in power	31.2
The government's attitude towards the mass media	29.2
The state policy of supporting the mass media in general	44.7
The way relevant legislation is implemented	22.5
The prestige of the publication, radio/TV station	41.1
The authority of the editor	10.3
The authority of the journalist	38.3
The competence of the officers in charge at the institution which is supplying the information	30.4
The level of transparency in that institution	38.3
Other factors	2

Opinion Poll*Table 2**To what extent are you familiar with the kinds of information kept secret by public authorities / institutions?*

	Well	Partially	Not at all
%	7.9	62.1	30

*Table 3**What do you usually do when your access to information is being limited?*

	%
Invoke additional arguments	56.5
Refer to legislation	52.6
State that you will inform the public opinion	52.6
State that you will appeal to the management of the institution in question	18.2
State that you will appeal to hierarchically upper bodies	15.4
State that you will appeal to a court of law	5.5
Go to the management of the institution in question	27.1
Go to the hierarchically upper bodies	13.4
Go to a court of law	3.1
Inform the management of the newspaper	37.1
Promise to ignore this source and never ask it for information again	20.6
Employ informal procedures	22.1
Go to other sources of information	58.9
Never encountered such cases	2.4
Do not undertake anything	4.3
Other	2.4

*Table 4**To what extent do you think the population of the Republic of Moldova is informed about the activity of public authorities / institutions by:*

	%		
	sufficiently	insufficiently	not at all
The press	32.1	65.9	2
Television	14.7	75.3	10
Radio	27.9	67.7	4.4
News agencies	37.7	57.9	4.4

*Table 5**Is the activity of the following public authorities / institutions sufficiently transparent?*

	%	
	yes	no
The presidency of the Republic of Moldova	18.5	81.5
The parliament of the Republic of Moldova	27.8	73.2
The government of the Republic of Moldova	20.8	79.2
Constitutional Court	33.8	66.2
Supreme Court of Justice	19.2	80.8
General Prosecutor's Office	7	93
Court of Accounts	19.3	80.7

National Bank of Moldova	25.9	74.1
Ministry of Economy	26	74
Ministry of Industry	20.5	79.5
Ministry of Transportation and Communications	24.1	75.9
Ministry of Energy	21.5	78.5
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	23.3	76.7
Ministry of Finances	18.1	81.9
Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry	32.1	67.9
Ministry of Education	42.9	57.1
Ministry of Health	43.5	56.5
Ministry of Culture	51.5	48.5
Ministry of Ecology, Construction and Territory Development	43.8	56.2
Ministry of Labor and Social Protection	35.9	64.1
Ministry of Justice	17.9	82.1
Ministry of Interior	22.6	77.4
Ministry of Defense	26	74
Academy of Sciences of Moldova	50.7	49.3
Department of Privatization	15.2	84.8
Department of Customs Control	13.2	86.8
Information and Security Service	3.9	96.1
Department of Statistical and Sociological Analysis	28.1	71.9
Department of Civil Protection and Exceptional Situations	36.4	63.6
Prefectures	28.4	71.6
County Councils	35.3	64.7
Chisinau City Authorities	44.8	55.2
Municipal and Town Authorities	31.3	68.7
Institutions of higher education	40.4	59.6

Table 6

To what extent do you think the private life of public officials, deputies, other public officers should be covered by the mass media?

	To a larger extent than the lives of other citizens	To the same extent as the lives of other citizens	To a smaller extent than the lives of other citizens	Depending on the importance of the information that may have social, economic, political consequences for society
%	39.9	15.8	2	42.3

Table 7

When you were not allowed to meetings held by public institutions, which of the following reasons were given to you?

	%
You were not accredited	36.7
You didn't show your accreditation card	7.9
You were told that the meeting was a closed (secret) one	54.1
You were told the meeting was an internal one	33.6
You were told that the institution didn't like the political orientation of the publication / radio or TV station you represented	11
You were told you were a non-grata person in that institution	3.2
There was no room for everyone who wanted to attend	9
No reason given	15.4
I didn't encounter such situations	30

Opinion Poll**Table 8***What is your opinion concerning the evolution of the mass media in the last decade?*

	They have become more independent and more objective	They have remained the same as during the Soviet times	They have become even more dependent on state, economic and political bodies	Other
%	37.3	9.5	52.4	0.8

Table 9*Do you think there is censorship in the Republic of Moldova?*

	Open	Hidden	There is no censorship
%	13.5	81.3	5.2

Table 10*In your opinion, which of the following institutions use the mass media to manipulate the public opinion?*

	%
Public authorities / institutions as a whole	32
Some public institutions	14.2
Political forces, especially during elections	82.6
Political formations in power	79.1
Corrupt groupings	53.8
Other institutions	1.6

Table 11*With which of the following statements do you agree?*

	Journalists need to have certain privileges concerning the access to information	Access to information should be allowed to all people equally	Good journalists have sufficient possibilities to obtain the information they need
%	52.6	30.8	16.6

Table 12*What is your opinion about the recent changes made to the Criminal Code and the Code on Administrative Offenses, which concern penalties for obstructing the access to information?*

	They are welcomed	They are too harsh	They should be made harsher	I am not familiar with the changes	Other
%	40,5	4,8	24,9	29	0,8

Table 13*What is your opinion about the laws concerning the protection of honor, dignity, professional reputation of citizens and organizations in the Republic of Moldova?*

	They correspond to the state of affairs in our country	They are in favor of those being criticized	They are in favor of the mass media
%	39.9	55.7	4.4

Table 14*What is your opinion about the Press Law?*

	It is obsolete and a new law is needed	It is old and needs changing	It is not needed in general	It ought to be repealed, and the Code of Journalistic Ethics ought to be turned into law	Other
%	22.2	33.1	12.4	31.9	0.4

Journalism ethics

Accente and Ethical Incidents

Ion ENACHE

President, National Committee for Professional Ethics of the Journalists of Moldova

After the unprecedented “enrollment” of the Chisinau media by election criteria, after the unprecedented “buying off” of the print and electronic media by the new governing party, we are now facing a new social-political and deontological phenomenon—the “killer-ism” in the media. This is a kind of wanton verbal assassinations, where the word has become the most effective means of revenge and the most lethal weapon. The promoters of this phenomenon recently have been... Who do you think? The young journalists from *Accente*, which is the most free—as it declares itself—newspaper in the country. Its biography is encompassed in a dozen issues, although its staff claim that there were predecessors too: *A.B.C.*, *Aghiuta* (see no.9. p.6). All right, maybe for those predecessors, too, the word was a sort of panacea against all ills. Maybe they, too “approached fiercely the most sensitive and sore issues in our society” through “the stinging, ironic, sarcastic phrase and pamphlet,” but I am sure they did not stomp people’s private lives with their dirty boots.

As a reader and professional journalist, I have been following the newspaper’s evolution from its first to the last issue. I saw its appearance as a revelation. I was saying to myself, look, here is a newspaper that is not afraid to take on issues, that is trying to shed light on more shady areas regardless of the person, orientation, party, rank.

People were saying it could be owned by Pasat, Urechean, Diacov, Voronin, Rosca. I wasn’t convinced. I saw all of them hooked up by the newspaper.

The seed of suspicion towards their free courage was sown by a phrase, quoted by Traianus himself in no.5, when someone offered to him one day: “I’ll pay you as much as you want, just stop writing, that is I’ll pay even for your silence!”

Pah! I said. Really? And I wouldn’t have made a great deal of it had I not noticed other “rules,” by which *Accente* approached issues. One such issue is the Art Studio Buciumul. All right, maybe Tudor Tataru did lay an eye on the premises of the Art School Sciusev, on whose grounds the studio is allegedly located (see no.4), but there is other information too, which contradicts the first and which is accompanied by arguments that Tudor Tataru and other people mentioned at a press conference. Why did the fiery truth rangers not include them at least for the sake of “balance,” as the professional ethics unanimously accepted across the world requires? *Accente* continues punching Tataru and his studio, stating blindly that the studio is “a tartar tavern reeking of garlic and sour wine” rather than “a center of our national culture,” as the studio is referred to by its protectors. I am not saying that wild emotions are subtly aiming at some of our values. I am asking myself why those who wrote the letter to defend the art school are citizens who endure suffering, while the authors supporting the studio are “celebrities”? Because, I dare say, whatever our attitude

towards the value of those personalities and institutions, if one should compare to them the people from *Accente*, then the latter have accomplished next to naught.

One more thing—this time about ULIM (Free International University of Moldova). What a fuss there, too! But the university’s rector Andrei Galben is not a person who’d allow *Accente* sting him. Also, some of them (even Sergiu Afanasiu himself) were until very recently heads of departments, counselors, even pro-rectors at ULIM. Sergiu Afanasiu was until last year one of the most consistent promoters of ULIM. But it seems that the deal failed, and seeing themselves outside ULIM, and having at hand a brand new newspaper, why not say out loud who is who at ULIM?

The mess caused by the newspaper’s behavior did not start from the facts written down on paper, not from the colors in which the ULIM employees were painted (in line with the publication’s style, isn’t it?), but from the signature under the article—L.Busuioc. This is a normal thing for those who are familiar with this story and who know very well that journalist Leonid Busuioc was Galben’s spokesperson for a number of years—that is a sort of boss for ULIM’s relations with the mass media. He hasn’t been spokesperson for a while now. But he could have signed the article. And it came as no surprise that Galben’s fury poured down on Leonid Busuioc, so that he had to explain to all the people he met: “But it wasn’t me! I have no idea about such an article!” In the paper’s newsroom he was told straight: “No, it wasn’t you. It’s Larisa Busuioc, our employee.” Sergiu Afanasiu, who is very well aware of the fact that his predecessor in Galben’s office was Leonid Busuioc, did nothing to avoid the confusion (that is to spell out the full name, or include an explanation). Why? To sow even more confusion? To split in two Galben’s fury? Or to try and use Leonid Busuioc in criticizing Galben?

The mess doesn’t end here. Andrei Strambeanu, who is also mentioned in “The History of a Devalued Galben” [*galben* in Romanian means coin—t.n.] in no.3, published an article in *L.A.*, no.31, called “The History of a Calumny,” which began as follows: “Mr. Leonid Busuioc no longer likes anything about ULIM since he has stopped working there.” Naturally. The man had bought it, and for him L.Busuioc meant Leonid Busuioc! How could he possibly know that Sergiu Afanasiu cheated on signatures and that L.Busuioc could be a ghost-name that hid in its shadow Sergiu Afanasiu himself.

But let’s not run ahead of things. As Andrei Strambeanu said, let’s leave it to the court “to discover this name, too.”

Let’s go back now to “killer-ism” as a phenomenon and to media ethics, because these are the real subjects of our discussion.

The National Committee for Journalistic Ethics of Moldova received a letter signed by university professor Ion Melniciuc. One ought to mention that Ion Melniciuc is one of the central characters, or “targets of attack” in *Accente* (see “The Man in the Shadow” in no.4). It’s not that he was attacked or unmasked more fiercely than others (Alexandru Roman, Eugenia Duca, Nicolae Cernomaz, etc.). It’s just that

Journalism ethics

he, unlike others, turns out to be more proud, for others have had a much harder time of it but prefer to be silent because they feel guilty or have more immunity. Besides, Mr. Melniciuc had the bad luck to protest in the *Faclia* newspaper, for which he “took a few more punches” in issue no.5 of *Accente*. Here are a few excerpts from the letter written by him to the National Committee for Ethics:

“...we would like to inform you that the new free weekly *Accente* (publisher Sergiu Afanasiu) has launched from the very start an unprecedented slander campaign against citizens of the Republic of Moldova, who have not been guilty of anything that would make them liable to slander. The frenzied journalists from this vile publication have made use of the heavy artillery of **demagogy**—which they confuse with **democracy**—and put everyone they don’t like through a fire of slander, of which only they are capable. In numbers 4 and 5 alone about 80 people were impaled, attacked viciously, and defamed in a barbarous manner. These were state officials, politicians, rectors, teachers, scientists, writers, journalists, singers, artists, business people, etc. [Mr. Melniciuc, had you read all the issues from first to last, you would have seen that the number of those people is incomparably greater.]

“The pseudo-journalists from this publication are in flagrant violation of the Code of Professional Ethics of the Journalists in Moldova. The wickedness of these pseudo-journalists is obvious: they attack with masks on. They use as signatures pseudonyms (masks) that one is disgusted to utter...

“As they are not on good terms with elementary ethics, these ‘valiant men’ trespass like ordinary hooligans on the personal lives of people in order to slander them publicly. The language they use makes them liable to a criminal investigation: **incestuous, abominable person, decrepit superman, bellicose, conjurer, libertine lady, shameless lady, bungler, ass-licking singers, wild sheep, etc.**

“Does one need more arguments to stop the wantonness of the frenzied pseudo-journalists from *Accente*?”

All right, Mr. Melniciuc. Let’s take it easy and not overdo it. It is the easiest way to forbid and to stop, which is usually done by authorities. It is more difficult to make it out when “the language used is liable to an investigation” and when it is part of a writer’s arsenal. Or perhaps we should revise these expressions by law? A craftsman who does a bad job is called bungler. Are there no bunglers in politics and in culture? An impulsive, aggressive, quarrelsome person is called a bellicose person. Should the adjective be banned? We will not analyze the adjectives you mentioned, because you know them better. The crux of the problem is different (especially for justice): whether a certain adjective was used in good faith or in bad faith. That is, whether the author used the adjective to slander the person in question or point out his/her drawbacks, actions, facts, which could be personal but could also cause damage to society (especially when we are speaking about a public person who holds an official position).

I am not saying that the “frenzied journalists” from *Accente* are not confusing oftentimes democracy with demagogy or that the language they use is free of salaciousness. On the contrary, that is a violent, bellicose language. But let’s take a look at the other side of truth, too. By its disclosures and investigative articles this newspaper

brings facts and documents (and even personal characteristics of the subjects) to the fore and lays them on the table of public opinion. Newspapers in our country, regardless of their color, bare their fangs and pour out their venom only during elections, when their owners send them on a mission “to destroy by all means” the competition. The rest of the time, our newspapers carry on with innocuous journalism, i.e. they’d put up a few mosquito bites or cover events superficially and drift wherever the events would take them. It is up to the courts to see and tell us whether the facts published in *Accente* are true or not. But if the subjects do not take their grievances to court, this means they prefer to be silent or turn to a person’s “honor” and “dignity” (Art.7 from the Civil Code). By the way, in countries with advanced democracy laws define “honor” and “dignity” as “reputation” and “honor.” “Reputation” means a person’s appreciation by other people, while “honor” means one’s appreciation of oneself. How could a court of law judge an “appreciation” (that is opinion) of someone by someone else. Let’s not forget that the right to an opinion is a fundamental one!

The crux of the ethical problem is elsewhere: the journalists at *Accente* make no “clear distinction between ‘information’ and ‘opinion’” (as art.4 in the Ethics Code requires); they do not understand that “although opinions are subjective by their nature and should not be measured against the criterion of accuracy, in reality they should nevertheless be subject to an honest and ethical expression” (art.6); they disregard the obligation to avoid “unconditionally insulting expressions, which may cause moral and physical damage” (art.10); and, finally, they do not respect “the individual’s right to a private life” (art.12). I wonder who allowed those people from *Accente* to tread in their filthy boots on the private life of Eugenia Duca (no.7), Lenuta Burghila (no.8), or Andrei Strambeanu (no.9)?

As the saying goes, don’t put a club in the hands of a crazy man and don’t put a word in the mouth of a mad man. Such “information” (and not “opinions”) indeed makes the journalists at *Accente* liable to an investigation. Because they have violated the fundamental right to privacy.

There are more articles in the Ethics Code, about which the “newspaper killers” have never heard and probably don’t want to hear. What’s important to them is the sarcasm and the weight of the word—the blow. For what? For truth? Or for the welfare of the person who orders the word?

The courts and the prosecution are expected to express their opinion (and it would be normal for them to do so in some cases) on whether the facts in some articles in *Accente* are true. As for us, we welcome *Accente*’s courage and quarrelsome character. We are aware of the fact that among the diversity of “sprightly,” “sold” and “bought” newspapers in Chisinau there has to be at least one, which is tougher, more bellicose (for the sake of truth). We are also aware of the fact that the truth is not liked by everybody. On the contrary, sometimes it is very inconvenient. Some people would like to see truth locked up, and in this case we are on *Accente*’s side. But when truth is simply kept for small change or to be cheated (as it sometimes happens in *Accente*) the people will learn about it sooner or later, the aura of the performance will fade in the eyes of the readers and, along with it, so will *Accente*.

Screen Esthetics

TV Films Under the Sign of Violence

Larisa UNGUREANU

During the totalitarian-Soviet period, the consumers of television films had access to two channels: the local one (Chisinau) and the central one (Moscow). If you didn't manage to see a certain film in movie theaters, you could certainly watch it later on television, which sooner or later would show it.

Culture, cinematography included, was subjected to massive ideologization. The hatred for the class enemy represented the foundation of many films, especially of those with a historical subject or when the subject was the confrontation of the two "camps": the capitalist and socialist ones.

Our viewer was cultivated for decades on end in the spirit of the struggle between the good and the evil, the good being of course part of the Soviet way of thinking, while the evil came from the West, from the other world. Our viewer became accustomed to hate everything that was alien and did not fit into the blueprint of communist morals.

Concerning foreign films, they were selected by committees whose majority members were trained in the field but who took care not to allow in any other ideology but the Soviet one. Nevertheless, sometimes films of high artistic quality did make it onto our screens. Also, the scissors of censorship cut out everything that was considered to be damaging to the morals of the Soviet man (sex scenes, naked people, scenes of violence, etc.).

Along with perestroika forbidden films came to the TV screen (such as *The Commissar*, for instance) as well as foreign films, especially serials. One of them was the Mexican serial *The Rich Cry Too*, which managed to transfix in front of the TV-sets millions of viewers from the entire ex-Soviet Union. The critics gave it a bad grade, rightly believing that our viewers deserved something better than those "soap operas," as Latin American films were called. We should remember that in intellectual circles there was a sense of piety for Western culture. Especially valued was the freedom of expression that creative professions enjoyed. From this point of view the critics were perfectly right, as Western cinematography gave to the world great personalities and films that became part of the golden fund of world cinematography. But towards the turn of the '90s there were no longer ideological committees and censorship had been eliminated. So... I will not be mistaken if I say that chaos had set in in broadcasting. The "concern" for the viewer had been replaced by profit on the viewer's account. The idea of freedom was understood wrongly. Besides Latin American serials the screen started to be filled with vampires, supermen, one-man killers, criminals, psychopaths and assassins, bodyguards, police officers, homosexuals and lesbians, hallucinating sex scenes and rape, blood, explosions, shoot-outs; Death became the most frequent character and perhaps the most loved one by the creators of this seventh art. And not Death alone.

Even the post-Soviet cinematography started producing films that were not much different from the imported ones, *Little Vera* (directed by Vasilii Pichul) being just one example. I am holding in my hands the magazine *Sovetski Ekran* (The Soviet Screen, 1989, no.2) which publishes excerpts from reader letters, many of whom were indignant about the cursing, the extremely odd scenes, in their opinion, which they had never seen before in Soviet films. "What I saw makes me feel sick, as if I swallowed a worm." "I am ashamed to tell my husband and my son that I saw this film." The film *Intergirl* (directed by Piotr Todorovski) came as a cold shower for the Soviet viewer. One critic wrote with irony about the excesses of the new trends, saying that beggars, prostitutes, and drug addicts, who had multiplied so much on the screen, were like "presents brought by a drunk Santa Claus."

For decades the Soviet viewer was able to see on the screen only the nice part of life. The viewer did not suspect that this was a strategy and was part of the state cultural policy. Transparency threw film directors into the other extreme and they rushed—especially the younger ones—to take on taboo topics: prostitution, drug addiction, the environmental catastrophe, the degradation of family life, physical violence. Hence the reaction of the viewers, who also did not like the avalanche of foreign films that had flooded the screen. Here is a passage from a letter from the same issue of *Sovetski Ekran*, which was written by a person who was horrified by what she saw in *Fanny and Alexander*: "I had a feeling as if I was trampled down, especially that I could hear dirty speech and laughter similar to a horse neighing."

Today no one publishes such letters any longer, and viewer opinions are completely ignored by film distributors. Also, the two TV channels are no longer the only ones, to which we can turn. There are private channels showing video films, there is also the SunTV joint venture, which offers several packages of satellite channels. The viewer is shocked not so much by the immense amount of information as by television films, mostly American ones, in which violence, in all its forms, gushes freely over an unprepared viewer, who oftentimes identifies what's happening on the screen with life and is not able to subject that information to analysis, to decode it and avoid being influenced or affected by the scenes of violence. Karate fighters, terrorists, psychopaths, drug addicts, prostitutes—these are the characters that can be seen in almost every film. Murders, blood, fighting, rape, burglaries—these are the subjects that have invaded TV channels in various forms and genres. "I am ashamed to watch films on television sitting next to my son," said doctor Maria Boghean (Fluid Center, Chisinau), during a round table discussion on violence. "Can nothing really be done to stop this avalanche of violence of all sorts to which we are subject daily? I have to deal with patients who were badly influenced by films."

Screen Esthetics

"Violence is assimilated, especially at an early age," said Lucia Savca (Rehabilitation Center Armonie). "We can notice violent behavior among children and adolescents as I have never seen before. Where do these children see scenes of violence? Obviously, on television!"

What could I add as a critic? It is the tragedy of our viewers that they suck everything up from the surface, like a sponge. That they do not have the ability to select. In fact, the films are not to blame. All you have to do is turn off the TV, if there is no other solution. But cruelty, in its most monstrous forms, will reach us anyway.

I, too, share this opinion: the information contained in some films may affect the brain of a child or adolescent. Take for example the American serial *The X-Files*. Why? Because of the impossibility to verify this information and its degree of verity. What is the point of this serial? I used to ask myself oftentimes, especially when the authors' fantasy flew beyond all limits of credibility. Being from a genre that crosses detective films, thrillers and science fiction, *The X-Files* acquires sometimes distorted forms, which, excuse me for this expression, generates a feeling of bitter disgust. But when a critic faces a piece of art he has a feeling of fulfillment. And this is not happening in the case of *The X-Files*. The film is watched by children and adolescents, too, as it is shown in prime time. Just like other films that have extremely violent and bloody subjects. Just a few examples: *Natural Born Killers*, *Over the Top*, *Comando*, *Capital Punishment*, *Rambo*, *Robocop*. They are tiresome, not to use a stronger word, by their show of death, violence, cruelty, the supremacy of force. Should this be the refuge of the viewer

after a day of hard work or hours of searching for a job? The feeling of hatred cultivated knowingly, which I mentioned at the beginning, was replaced by a feeling of horror and inability to defend oneself. A huge question mark arose in the viewer's mind: What kind of society is coming over us? (It is not by accident, I believe, that at the last parliamentary elections the population voted for yesterday.)

As there are no entertaining programs that could somewhat soften down the feeling of horror, TV channels use a lot of films. You choose. At any time of day or night. The question is whether our viewers are able to choose and what do they get? In a survey I read recently, a respondent was asked, why do you want to go abroad? The answer was more than exotic: I learned the manners of the aristocrats in Mexican films (sic!). Yes, many viewers, especially women, choose Latin American serials. Perhaps also to learn. Others are satisfied with thrillers and detectives. To learn. Suspects under investigation have recognized in courts that they had seen on TV murder scenes and were influenced by them. Given the absence of firm moral barriers and of culture, it is not difficult to presume that this is exactly how things are. In any event, we need a survey, some research on this topic. The results could form the basis of some cultural policy projects in the area of TV programming. Also, we need to educate our viewers in various ways: information about films, authors, the introduction of at least an optional course in the history of world cinematography, radio and TV shows on cinematography, periodicals. Our viewers do not have any of these. ■

Statistics

The Circulation of the Printed Press

*Nicolae NEGRU, Editor-in-chief,
Mass Media in Moldova*

The opinion poll carried out by the Center for Sociological Analysis and Research CIVIS of Chisinau and commissioned by the Institute for Public Policies shows that 11 percent of the population read newspapers every day, while 30 percent read newspapers several times a week. If we are to compare these figures with existing circulations, they show rather a wish or a reality from the past. Eleven percent means that in Moldova, which has a population of four million, 160-170 thousand newspapers are being sold (assuming that every copy is read by two-three people). But the real circulation figures are much more modest.

About 39 thousand daily copies are being distributed in Moldova, of which 6000 (15%) come from Russia. For a population of 4 million this is an insignificant figure. The large share of rural population, which generally reads less than city dwellers (according to the same survey, only 35% of village inhabitants read newspapers daily or several times a week, while in cities this figure is 51%), makes the situation

of Romanian-language dailies even more complicated.

Nevertheless, half of the daily newspaper circulation is in Romanian and the other half is in Russian.

The situation of the newspapers that are trying to stand on their own feet is being aggravated by the Posta Moldovei monopoly in press distribution (subscriptions) and by the Moldpresa monopoly (news-stand sales). All attempts to set up alternative press distribution networks have failed. The price set by these two monopolist organizations represents 30-60% of the subscription price.

The little advertising there is doesn't seem to be distributed according to the criterion of circulation. There are no independent services that would confirm the circulation figures announced by the papers themselves. It is obvious that the Russian-language newspapers have more advertising than the Romanian-language ones, although the circulations of the latter are not smaller; on the contrary, it is larger (except for the newspaper *Komsomolskaia Pravda v Moldove*, which has the largest circulation, about 50 thousand copies, but which is "poorer" in terms of advertising than, say, *Ekonomicheskoe Obozrenie* with a

circulation six times smaller). One cannot exclude the fact that Russian business people ignore Romanian-language papers deliberately. For example, Lukoil Moldova placed its tenth-anniversary advertisements only in Russian-language newspapers.

One also ought to mention the effect of free subscriptions offered to certain categories of readers, which has become a general phenomenon in Moldova and which is characteristic not only of party newspapers but also of papers that deny or hide their political affiliation. One could use the fingers on one's hands to number the newspapers organized as a business, which have subdivisions for marketing and advertising.

Generally, the print media in Moldova, both Romanian and Russian, are distributed mainly by subscription—70–80%. The situation is different in the case of the dailies *Flux*, *Jurnal National*, *Vremea*, as well as all Moscow-based papers, which sell directly more than 50% of their copies.

It is interesting to note that two dailies are published by the government, while the other two are affiliated to the Popular Christian Democratic Party (PPCD) (*Flux* and *Tara*). *Vremea* is published by a group of journalists who have not declared a certain political affiliation, but whose orientation is visibly pro-Russian.

Moldova Suverana seems to be following the actions of the government more closely than *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, but without daring to criticize them. The Russian version of this governmental daily is more aggressive, but not on account of the government. Both publications carry once in a while (*NM* having an advantage in this respect) issue stories, which are usually written by professionals in various areas of the national economy in a language that is not always attractive to readers. Generally, the economy is well covered by both newspapers. *MS* lags behind though, due to the general weakness of Romanian-language economic reporting, which still has not come to after the domination of Russian terminology. One can notice prudence when it comes to covering politics; interpretations favor the government in power. *NM* betrays an obvious sympathy for the government's pro-CIS inclinations, while *MS* seems to cover with more zeal the government's pro-Western declarations. From a strictly professional point of view, both *MS* and, to a larger extent, *NM* seem to continue the serious tradition of Soviet-Russian journalism, while *MS* seems to react more slowly to the modern trends in this sort of journalism.

Although both *Tara* and *Flux* are affiliated to PPCD and address roughly the same audience, they do differ in style. The former follows the tradition of the Romanian press between the wars, modernizing and adapting it quite successfully to the local character, while the latter is conceived of as a Western-style newspaper. The form is the same, while the content, the tone of information and opinions are often marked by partisanship. There are similarities in news selection and in the content of many "exposing" stories published by both newspapers. Orthodox Christian and cultural stories are regularly present on their pages (more

so in the Friday edition of *Flux*). The economic sections of both papers (which seems to be more solid in *Tara*) are addressed to a non-expert reader.

The *Vremea* daily is a new paper (it has been published for two years now), which may be qualified as a Russian tabloid similar to *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, which it seems to have used as a free source of inspiration down to graphical similarities. This is a 100% Russian paper in political orientation; it freely criticizes the government and the president and tries to find a balance between irony and serious coverage; but at the same time *Vremea* tries to meet the interest of younger readers for the Western world, especially in the area of entertainment. Following the example of the comsomolist *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, the journalists at *Vremea* disregard the veil of Soviet bashfulness and write for instance about the extravagance of the American star Britney Spears or the "buttocks" of volleyball players, being in this respect ahead of *Flux* and *Tara*, which sometimes express moralizing attitudes that touch on bigotry.

From the Romanian-language weeklies only *Luceafarul* (PRCM), *Comunistul*, and *Dialog* (founded by PDM) acknowledge their political affiliation. *Tara*, which until recently was called "the organ of the Popular Christian Democratic Front," describes itself now as a "publication of information and analysis;" *De Facto*, which is published in Romanian and Russian by the Centrist Union affiliated to the ex-president Petru Lucinschi, introduces itself as an "independent weekly of information, analysis and entertainment." From among party newspapers, *Luceafarul* seems to be more abreast of modern journalism, more ingenious in mediating the communication between party leaders and readers and in criticizing the power. It is worth mentioning that the weekly has expressed its intention not to address only readers interested in politics. *De Facto* stands out by its analyses, which are sometimes quite good, of political and economic actions undertaken by the government, parliament and the president. Both in terms of topics chosen and language, *Comunistul* is trying to be a "collective propagandist and collective organizer." *Dialog* seems to have finally found a good model to follow after a quite gray period.

Saptamana, whose editor considers himself a fervent supporter of ex-president Lucinschi, is preoccupied in every of its issues with the relations between Romania and Basarabia, Romania and the Republic of Moldova, and with the Romanian world in general, trying to keep record of its weaknesses and "sins." The main part of the newspaper space is taken up by miscellaneous facts, sentimental letters, useful tips, stars; *Saptamana* is thus doubtlessly first in the concentration of breasts, nudes and semi-nudes per newspaper page. The case may be though that it is the heavy share of entertainment which has been for years securing for this newspaper a segment in Moldova's small newspaper market. *Saptamana* has a lenient attitude towards the communist government—even a paternalistic one.

The Friday edition of *Flux* is conceived as a magazine

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almost for everyone. The place on which *Saptamana* spits, *Flux* kisses, and vice-versa. When it doesn't have political orders, *Flux* is a quite diverse and well-structured weekly, covering almost everything that happens in Moldova. Sometimes it publishes stories exposing wrongdoing, but these are not obtained through investigative reporting but rather along "party lines" or from information leaks. It may use a little self-irony. The paper is much tougher in criticizing PPCD's competition than criticizing the governing party.

Literatura si Arta has always been the same. Besides *Glasul Natunii*, this is the only publication that still debates the problem of unification with Romania and of our national identity. *Glasul Natunii*, "the newspaper of the nation's reintegration," has been lately the messenger of the Social Liberal Union "Forta Moldovei."

Jurnal de Chisinau seems to be the closest from among all the other publications to what is called an independent newspaper. It was founded by the well-known journalist Val Butnaru (who had also founded *Flux*) in company with a business person. The newspaper is still looking for an optimal, defining graphic and contents formula, trying to address a wide audience, from intellectuals to the girls in village discos. This search is imposed by the current economic conditions, when every extra reader is important for survival. Therefore, *JC* is trying to cover as large a segment of the political spectrum as possible on the basis of democratic and pluralistic principles, being at the same time a declared opponent of the communists. Also, in its supplement "Succesul sau" the newspaper is venturing into Romanian-language economic journalism.

In the footsteps of *Jurnal de Chisinau* follows *Timpul*, which was launched in September of this year. It used to feature 32 A2 pages, which made it the thickest newspaper in Moldova. *Timpul* is structured and compartmentalized according to Western newspaper models (two compartments), having one of the best designs, a clear pro-democracy political stance but without expressing an attitude towards the communist government. After two months of publication, the newspaper found itself in a financial crisis, reduced its volume to 16 A3 pages, and was left with an uncertain future.

Accente is published by a group of "rebellious" youngsters, who like provoking scandals that are not always the result of professional journalism. *Tineretul Moldovei* becomes deeply involved in covering politics on the side of pro-democratic and pro-European forces.

Capital defines itself as an "information source on Moldovan and world markets." It also publishes commentaries to and analyses of some governmental decisions. The stories are translated, usually from Russian.

Except for *Kommunist*, none of the other Russian-language newspapers declare their political affiliation. But one can trace *Novoe Vremea* to the Democratic Party (PDM), just as it is known that *Moldavskie Vedomosti* is "patronized" by one of the former PRCM leaders, who recently "emigrated" to PDM. *Argumenty i Fakty v Moldove*

belongs to Ion Musuc, former PDS leader, who has left the party recently; *Kommersant Moldovy* seems to be one of the richest papers, published on vellum paper, and has assumed the role of spokes-person for the Tiraspol separatists.

While part of the Romanian-language press are impatient in their reformist and pro-Western movement forward, always ready to push the cart of democracy before the horse, a part of the Russian-language press move in the same direction unwillingly, dragging their feet, being pushed on by the flow of events rather than by their own intentions. This category includes *Kishinevskie Novosti*, *Kommersant Moldovy* and, to a lesser extent, *Delovaia Gazeta*, which continue to publish nostalgic articles. As they are against any kind of rapprochement with Romania they operate from the platform of Moldovenism, reprinting (usually from *Saptamana*) articles that paint Romania in dark colors. Their attitude to the communist government is generally kind, following closely all promises to join the Russia-Belarus Union and to integrate deeper within the CIS. *Kommersant Moldovy* criticizes extremely vehemently the government from the platform of the Tiraspol separatists. (At the end of the year this newspaper was closed down by a court ruling following a request from the Prosecutor General's Office). With small exceptions such as *Moldavskie Vedomosti* and *Novoe Vremea*, the Russian newspapers do not express a clear attitude towards Moldova's independence and its pro-European orientation, but they write their pro-CIS articles in all sincerity.

Being affiliated to PDM, *Moldavskie Vedomosti* and *Novoe Vremea* are in open opposition to the current government, publishing political and economic analytical articles, pleading not so much for European Integration as an end in itself as for a pragmatic and efficient strategy. Both publications stand out by their clear journalistic concept.

Ekonomicheskoe Obozrenie is perhaps the only newspaper that manages to live from sales and advertising. Its audience is a trained one, from the world of business, from governmental and political structures. Besides information and commentaries on economic subjects, *EO* also publishes adopted economic laws. The newspaper was founded by economists, who were later joined by journalists interested in economics. The newspaper has contributors writing from abroad about world economic trends. It avoids conflicts with the government and therefore it exhibits only moderate criticism.

Kishinevskii Obozrevatel puts on an image of an information source for foreigners living in Moldova, as it has a page in English. Its coverage focuses on politics, the economy and culture. It uses a moderate tone of voice, its articles are mainly informative, polemics being avoided.

One ought to point out to the stronger economic element in the Russian-language press. In Moldova there isn't a single Romanian-language paper focusing on the economy.

Concerning the local supplements of the Moscow newspapers *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, *Argumenty i Fakty* and *Trud*, one could say that their information value is limited

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to TV listings, advertising and a small number of news selected and commented on in such a way as not to bother the authorities. This is especially true of *Argumenty i Fakty v Moldove*. The *Trud* supplement is more aggressive; it is not afraid to say unpleasant things to the communists from a platform of common sense.

The total circulation of weeklies is about 254 thousand copies, of which about 124 thousand (49.3%) are published in Romanian. Moscow-based publications visibly dominate the Russian-language weeklies. Of 131 thousand copies published in Russian, about 81 thousand (62%) come from Moscow.

There are almost no publications from Romania, except for *Jurnal National*, which opened an office in Chisinau two years ago. But its circulation has been insignificant. (When this article was being prepared *JN* stopped publishing—e.n.) On December 1 a newspaper was launched, *Gazeta Romaneasca*, with a circulation of 3000 copies; this is a

weekly digest of the press in Romania, with pages that will cover events in Moldova.

Also, there is no Western press in our news-stands. The main reason for this are the prices, which are inaccessible for most people in Moldova.

Note: *Neither Posta Moldovei nor Moldpresa are offering data about the circulation of newspapers they distribute, explaining this refusal by the contracts they have with publications. Therefore, the circulations used in this article are usually those indicated by the newspapers themselves. Exaggerations may sometimes reach several thousand copies. However, in general terms these figures can help us figure out the share of each publication on the newspaper market in Moldova. When the editors refused to offer such figures, either estimations were made on the basis of sales or extrapolations were made from previous years.*

	Foundation year	Format	# of Pages	Circulation	Price, lei
Romanian-language dailies					
Moldova Suverana (4 times per week)	1924	A2	4	7232	0-50
Tara (Tuesday, Thursday and Friday)	1990	A2	4	7000	1-00
Flux daily	1995	A2	4	3000 (estim.)	2-00
Jurnal National	2000	A3	16	2500 (estim.)	1-00
Russian-language dailies					
Nezavisimaia Moldova (4 times per week)	1991	A2	4	10500	1-00
Vremea	2000	A3	16	3000 (estim.)	1-50
Dailies from Russia					
Trud	1921	A2	4	2000 (estim.)	2-00
Komsomolskaia Pravda	1925	A3	16	4000 (estim.)	1-50
Russian-language weeklies					
Kisinevskie Novosti	1990	A2	8	8420	2-00
Delovaia Gazeta	1991	A3	24	8200	2-00
Ekonomicheskoe Obozrenie	1992 (1990)	A3	40	8497	3-00
Kommersant Moldovy	1992	A3	20	10000	1-00
Kisinevskii Obozrevatel	1993	A2	8	3000	18264
Moldavskie Vedomosti (biweekly)	1995	A2	4		0-50
Kommunist	1996	A3	8	6500	1-00
Weeklies from Russia with local offices					
Trud, Friday ed.	1921	A3	32 (12 local suppl.)	15619	2-40
Komsomolskaia Pravda, Friday ed.	1925	A3	32 (12 local suppl.)	50700	18295
Argumenty i Fakty	1979	A3	32 (8 local suppl.)	15000	2-50
Romanian-language weeklies					
Literatura si Arta	1930	A2	8	6800	0-50
Tineretul Moldovei	1968	A2	8	18540	1-00
Glasul Natiunii	1989	A3	16	2000 (estim.)	1-00
Saptamina	1992	A3	32	20507	2-00
Flux, Friday edition	1995	A2	16	20850 (estim.)	2-00
Luceafarul	1995	A3	16	8900	1-00
Comunistul	1996	A3	8	6500	1-00
Dialog	1997	A2	12	6514	1-00
Capital	1998	A3	12	6780	1-00
Jurnal de Chisinau	1999	A2	16	8650	2-00
De Facto	2000	A3	12	10554	1-00
Accente	2001	A3	8	1000 (estim.)	1-00
Timpul	2001	A3	16	6000 (estim.)	2-00